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MICK FARREN

THE TALE OF WILLY'S RATS

THE RISE OF THE MOST DEMONIAC ROCK BAND EVER

I'm waiting in the wings, and I'm twitching. It may be the coke, but there are twelve thousand people out there, and no matter how often it happens, you still twitch.

Jerry passes me a bottle of Dimple Haig and I take a hit from it. I'm just over the edge of really keeping control, but the occasional lurch is expected of us.

The sound system is pumping out Beethoven, accompanied by the electric grunts of amp tests.

Chas comes over to where we are standing. He has taken his shirt off and is sweating. He jerks his thumb towards the stage.

'It's all together. There's water and cold beers behind Connie's stool.'

I pass him the whisky bottle.

'Got a fag?'

He pulls a battered pack of Pall Malls out of his jeans and shakes one free. I put it in my mouth, and he lights it. The cigarette is bent and drooping.

Roth comes hustling through the backstage. Marshall Roth, the ace promoter, is also sweating, but he keeps his jacket
on.

'Are we all ready to go?'

For a while nobody seems inclined to answer him. Then Jerry slowly turns round.

'We're ready.'

It's obvious Roth would love to make one of the snappy tough-bitch comments that he flashes round *Rolling Stone* magazine, but he knows we~ might just walk clean out of his auditorium. If that happened, the kids could dismantle it, brick by brick.

Instead he only throws us a glance that carries the maximum contempt he thinks he can get away with, and walks on to the stage. Beethoven fades and there is a barrage of shouting. Roth holds up his hands and goes into his big nurse act.

'Okay, okay, I know you've had to wait a long time, but it's all together, but you people at the front, you must move back.'

Jerry pulls a face at me.

'That fuckin' move back routine.'

'The arsehole even does it on live albums.'

Roth is still demanding that the front rows move back before the show can go on when he spots Jerry sauntering on to the stage carrying his guitar. He quickly goes into the announcement.

'Ladies and gentlemen... Willy's Rats.'

Roth hurries off as the cheering bursts across the hall. Jerry pauses by a mike.

'You can all pile up the front and crush each other. I ain't worried.'

He slowly walks to his amp and plugs in. The rest of us follow him on to the stage. The lights make it like stepping into an oven. The audience are hidden in the darkness. Fleetingly I wonder if the letter-writer is out there, nursing his bullet.

I go into the prowling routine as Mac, Steve and Jerry briefly check their tuning. The kids are yelling for songs but I just creep round the stage, staring at them. Then Jerry starts the feedback, building it, suspending everything. I move to the middle of the stage, turn my back on the audience. The ritual of prowling has cooled out the twitch. I'm in control. The feedback is like holding your breath. As it becomes unbearable Connie opens up his drums and I swing round to the mike as the other three come in.

Don't listen for your footstep on the stairs.

Through the vast PA my voice is enormous. I cling to the mike stand as though it was my only support in a turmoil of hate-energy. It's the pose every singer copped from Gene Vincent. It's dramatic, but it's also easy. You start slow when the lights are throwing this much heat at you, otherwise you dehydrate before the show's half over.

I don't even long to see you.

I'm starting to sweat, my shirt's wet already and pretty soon all my makeup will have gone. I jerk my hand away from the mike and flick my hair out of my eyes. For a second I open them very wide, pause, head back, then down on the mike.

All those ladies with their pinned down eyes,
You really think they want to be you?

Jerry's voice edges in behind mine for the chorus.

Don't you know you missed that crucial sign?
Don't you realize you're down the line?
Don't even claim you once were mine,
You never figured in the grand design.

Guitar riff. Back off from the mike, eyes shut, mouth open vacantly. Then I suddenly snap them open and stare into the darkness. When rock writers go on about 'the snap transition from evil intellect to vacant idiocy', that is what they are talking about, the trick of tightening up and letting go. Bouncing the audience. With a controlled lurch I return to the mike.

The angel who leaves with early light,
She don't have no friends to condition.
She trusts her fantasies, she knows they're real.
Her life is not a proposition.

Jerry stumbles up to his mike. He has that cool hip stagger down to a fine art, Chuck Berry on muscle relaxant. We lay down the chorus, then I pick up the mike, close with Jerry and we advance. Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, the cosmic Frank and Jesse, right to the very front of the stage, step by step through the middle eight.

Life is more than
Coming down,
in the morning baby we could burn the town.

Stop.

I hurl the mike stand away from me and Mac and Jerry roar into their break.

During the solo I move to the back of the stage and lurk around the wall of amps. It's not time yet for a display of arse shaking, and I let Mac and Jerry go through their guitar king routine without any distractions. Then Jerry lurches back, Mac follows, and then in a line we do the macho stomp to the mikes for the middle eight again, this time with harmony. We do it without any fuckups, and then it's straight downhill to the end of the song.

I start to move some more towards the end, and sweat is really pouring off me. The crash to a finish.

Burn the town
Burn the town.

A wave of applause rolls over the stage. It's okay, it's working.

That's right, that's right.

'Thank you.'

Jerry and Mac are yelling to the crowd. Connie strips his shirt off and stands up to throw it into the front rows. There is a visible eddy in the crowd as a crew of boppers scramble for pieces.

I grab a beer from the tub of ice behind Connie and walk up to the mike.

'We're gonna have some fun. Right?' The roar comes back.

'Right!'

I pop the can.

'Right.'

I sure hope the letter-writer isn't out there. With his bullet.

It is hard really to say where it all started. You can't pinpoint an exact time when you realize that you have an ego that is a lot bigger than it ought to be.

I can remember, when I was very young, wanting to be the first man to land on the moon. I had announced the fact to a bunch of my parents' friends at one of those what-do-you-want-to-be-when-you-grow-up-little-boy sessions. They had all clucked about what an advanced child I was and then abandoned the idea in favour of how like my mother I looked. What they didn't realize was that I didn't want to walk on the moon for the discovery or the adventure, but because I wanted to be remembered forever. Even at that age, I think I was seven at the time. I had a morbid fear of death, of the unthinkable state of not being. It seemed desperately important to make a mark on history so that, even if I couldn't live for ever, I would at least be a household word for the rest of time, like, say, Columbus.

The launching of the first Sputnik put a final end to my dreams of being the great astronaut, but by then I had discovered something entirely different.

It seems that I was right in not trying to make it to the moon. I can't remember the names of any of the people who got there, and neither, it seems, can most of the people I meet. I can vaguely recall the spaceship being called Snoopy, and that I sat up all night watching it, but the picture was too bad, and I was too stoned to make out what was going on.

To take a less complicated view, I Suppose it began with *Heartbreak Hotel.* It was a warm summer night, almost too hot to do anything, and I was supposed to be doing French homework or something. I tried staring at the page for a long time, but nothing happened, and after a while I shut the book and turned on the radio. It was one of those ancient valve sets that became history when the transistor was invented. It took a long time to warm up, and when sound finally emerged from the speaker it was Doris Day, half buried by static.

Que sera sera
Whatever will be, will be.

I didn't pay much attention to either Doris Day or the announcer's spiel that followed. I stared out of the window at the Secondary Modern kids, unburdened by homework and parental ambition, hanging out on the pavement, and wondered how I was going to bluff or cheat my way through the French test the following day. Abruptly I was jerked back to the radio. Something strange and powerful was coming out of it. The cheap set that my father had given me for passing the Eleven Plus was producing heavy magic.

Well since my baby left me, I found a new place to dwell. -

It was like nothing I had ever heard before, the physical reaction was intense. I turned up the volume.

The bellhop's tears keep flowing, The desk clerk's dressed in black.

It wasn't what the song was about, it was the whole thing, it went far deeper than either words or tune. Just the way he sang the word 'black'. The hard sullen delivery and the tense guitar produced a dozen reactions and a hundred images.

Towards the end of the record my father walked into the room and arbitrarily switched off the radio.

'Turn off that bloody row, you're supposed to be working.'

I shot him a killer glance. He had drawn a line, and we were on different sides.

From then on I hustled, saved and begged to get myself a tiny cheap record-player, and

consumed all the rock and roll I could lay my hands on. Elvis, more Elvis, and then the others: Little Richard, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran, Buddy Holly. My father hated it, and used every excuse to separate me from the music. Any misdemeanour was punished by the record-player being impounded for a set period. The line became defined more and more closely.

About the same time, I saw my first James Dean movie and learned a lot about killer glances.

The first band got started when I was about fourteen. There was a group of us who would get together round somebody's house, play records, drink Cokes and smoke cigarettes. It's funny how I can still remember the music even though the names of the guys have begun to fade.

I remember one of them had a brother who was in America for some reason, and sent him new R & B singles. Every time he showed up he had some new little wonder. He turned us all on to strange things like *1 Put a Spell on You* by Screaming Jay Hawkins, and *Smokestack Lightning* by Howling Wolf. It was the same guy's brother who sent him a cheap guitar for his birthday. When he got one, we all had to have one too, and I saved my newspaper delivery money until I could pay the three pounds that the old man in the junk shop wanted for a beat-up Spanish guitar.

When three of us had guitars, and had managed to master the chords E, A and B, we would sit round in someone's garage or bedroom and strum and holler. *Be Bop a Lula, Long Tall Sally, Mean Woman Blues.* We'd spend hours watching Elvis movies to learn how to move our legs, and wear our shirts with the collars turned up in the back.

It must have lasted through almost a whole winter, hanging out playing and singing, but as the weather got warmer the first of the three of us found himself a girl. I remember her name was Ann, because on the increasingly rare occasions he would get together with us, we'd all play Little Richard's *Miss Ann* to piss him off.

As that summer drew on the drive of puberty eclipsed our homemade music, and guitars were left alone as we joined the weekend pack who hung out on the street corner, and cruised Woolworth's looking for someone to fumble in the back row of the cinema.

It wasn't until art school that another band came together. Being in art school was both a kind of accident and a door to a whole new existence.

While I had still harboured the last vestiges of the astronaut dream I had always told teachers and other prying adults that I wanted a career in physics. But the falling marks in everything but English and art, the result of hours of listening to rock or chasing birds, made a science vocation scarcely credible, and I began to tell anyone who asked that I wanted to be a commercial artist. In the end, the school careers adviser gave me an application form for the local art school. I took an exam, and to my surprise, I passed.

The long summer holiday, a transition between schoolboy and student, yielded a wealth of good things. I took a job digging holes in the road for the local council and with the new-found affluence of nine pounds a week plus overtime, I acquired a cheap electric guitar, a small amplifier and a motorcycle.

I also got laid for the first time.

Her name was Penny, and she came with the motorcycle, a kind of indirect bonus.

I had started hanging round as a junior member of a greaser crew who used a place near the station called Pop's Cafe as a club room and headquarters, and I was there that one night we got the word that some bunch like the Young Conservatives or Junior Rotarians were holding a beach party on a strip of sand dunes a few miles away.

One of the guys had a sidecar on his bike, and after loading it with beer, we took off to check out this social spectacle.

When we got there, it turned out to be a flock of bright young things in their best casual wear having a very ordinary sausage sizzle. The arrival of two dozen greasers, however, soon gave the event some bizarre overtones.

After about an hour of our hee-haw lurching presence, the Pepsi generation decided to call it a night, and they packed up their barbecue stove and left, giving us full possession of the beach. We built a fire of driftwood and deck chairs, and set to getting drunk.

A big guy, I think his name was Paddy, was howling round the beach, brandishing a huge piece of driftwood. He rushed into a group of girls, who had come with the crew, and they scattered squalling and shrieking with mock alarm. Waving his arms and shambling like King Kong, he cornered two by a beach hut. I staggered over, I was quite drunk myself by then, and grabbed one of them by the arm. She was small and blonde, with the sideways, calculating look that rocker birds seemed to cultivate.

'Do you want to be rescued?'

She giggled and nodded, and we lurched off into the sand dunes, falling into each other, laughing at Paddy yelling and cursing behind us. Eventually we flopped down in the sand, and I rolled over and started kissing her. To my surprise she responded enthusiastically for a long time. Finally she broke off and opened her eyes.

'I thought you were going to rescue me.' I grinned.

'Didn't I?'

'Not so I'd notice.'

'Want me to take you back to Paddy?'

'You don't look too bad.'

She grabbed me round the neck again, and we went on kissing. Tentatively I brushed my hand across the front of her T-shirt. Unlike most of the Woolworth's birds that I'd lured to the back row of the Odeon, she didn't immediately try to steer my hand away. I squeezed her small breast a little more definitely. She still didn't resist and, in fact, wriggled a little to show she was enjoying it.

I pulled her T-shirt loose from her jeans, and ran my hand across her stomach and up under her bra. I was fondling her breast when she abruptly stopped kissing me.

'Hold on a minute.'

She pulled away, and I thought I had blown it, but instead she pulled the T-shirt over her head, and unhooked her bra. Naked to the waist, her body was white in the darkness. She leaned towards me, and whispered in my ear.

'That'll make things easier.'

I slipped out of my shirt, and we rolled together. Little bits of sand made our chests abrasive as we pressed against each other.

After a while, I pushed my hand down inside her jeans, but again she cut short my fumbling.

'You're all thumbs, ain'tcha?'

She slithered out of her jeans and crouched in front of me. I began to undo the belt on mine, but she caught hold of my hand.

'Here, let me.'

It was actually going to happen. As she knelt in front of me, deftly undoing my jeans, I was filled with both fear and elation. I pushed her back on to the sand and squirmed on top of her, my jeans now looped around one ankle. Her breath was hot as she whispered in my ear.

'It's all right.'

'You sure?'

''Course.'

I fumbled my way clumsily inside her.

My head expanded.

It was actually happening.

And then it was all over.

Almost before it had started I had finished. I was filled with an overwhelming sense of failure.

For a few moments we lay together, then she wriggled.

'I'm freezing.'

Quickly she jumped up, and before I could even struggle into my shirt, she was brushing her hair, fully dressed.

As soon as I had my clothes back on, she grabbed me by the hand and we started walking.

'Let's go back to the fire.'

I nodded, I couldn't think of anything to say. It was the first time, and I'd blown it. I stared at the sea as we walked along the dark beach. It was black, and glinted with tiny points of light.

She squeezed my hand.

'You done that before?'

'Sure.'

'Yeah?'

She obviously didn't believe me.

A few hours later I took her back to her home on the council estate. Apart from that single remark it was like it had never happened.

The first few months of art school were a revelation, after the boys' grammar school. In that all male environment the atmosphere was one of constant tension. The pupils were treated like wild animals, to be tamed and kept down, while the teachers were fair game for anything their charges could put over on them.

At the art school it was entirely different. The staff there seemed solely concerned with giving us information and they were interested in what they were talking about. They didn't care how we dressed or behaved privately, and the conflicts of school were nowhere to be seen.

Working all day with women put me through another series of changes. In school they had been presented to us as the forbidden species, untouchable, like the King's deer or the white rhino.

The reaction to this was to glorify them, transforming them into sex-on-legs. It took a while to acclimatize to the fact that they were human beings, thinking, working and solving the same problems as you were.

The school also provided an environment for the first real band. The school authorities, although they didn't actively encourage us, tolerated us working out nearly every day, either in the hail or the student common room. The only time they gave us any trouble was when we began cutting classes to play rock and roll.

This first real band wasn't without its problems. After we had only been practising for a couple of weeks a clash was already becoming apparent.

The guitar player was an awkward public school boy called Mel. He was tall, clumsy and, after an all male boarding school, totally unable even to talk to girls without falling over his feet. But he did play the guitar reasonably well, by the standards of the time. He also had a friend called Pete, a strange, withdrawn kid, who had been taking guitar lessons for a couple of years, and together they were a ready-made rhythm and lead who had already played together.

This resulted in me trading my guitar for a bass, which I didn't mind because I was well aware that they both played better than I did.

The trouble really started over the choice of material. It was the days when the Shadows

were at their peak, and Mel and Pete couldn't get enough. For my part I felt we should be playing meatier stuff like *Rip It Up* and *Sweet Little Sixteen.* The drummer, a greaser called Stan, who had virtually been sent to art school as part of a probation order for car stealing, agreed with me for the most part, and had everything else been equal, the situation would probably have resolved itself in some sort of fifty-fifty compromise.

The inequality entered the picture in the shape of Mel's stinking rich parents, who spoiled him rotten. This meant that it was always Mel who paid the bills for all those things a band needs over and above the basic equipment, which we all had. He even bought us beer and hamburgers when we were broke. Because of this he felt he had a right to be kept happy, and we found ourselves limited to just three rockers, *That's Alright Mama. Be Bop A Lula* and *Johnny B. Goode.* The rest of our hour's worth of material were instrumentals, with Mel beaming out from behind his glasses, trying to look like Hank B. Marvin.

It wasn't until our first gigs that things began to get difficult.

The first time we ever appeared in front of an audience was at the art school Christmas dance. There was some locally popular trad band headlining the bill, and we had managed to talk our way into a half hour between their two sets.

Mel spent days planning how the stage should be set up, and what we should play.

It seemed we could probably fit five numbers into the time we had, and Mel decided that *Johnny B. Goode* was enough for us rockers, but by way of a compromise it was agreed that we would finish with it.

The only consolation I had was that, since Mel wanted the band to be arranged exactly the same as the Shadows, as bass player I got to stand in the middle of the stage, with the single microphone in front of me, as I was the only one uninhibited enough to sing.

There was a brief argument about whether my voice could get through Mel's echo unit, but I managed to get my own way by blinding him with quasi science.

We spent the first half of the dance sitting in the pub around the corner, drinking stout and mild and playing the pin-table. We had all dressed up in black shirts and jeans to give ourselves some kind of uniformity when we went on stage. Underneath all the clowning and jokes, we were really scared.

Eventually it became time for us to get it together, and with our knees going weak we hurried back to the school hall.

The trad band was zipping through the final chorus of *Tiger Rag,* and the art school beatniks were stomping happily. There was applause as they finished, and all too suddenly the organizer was beckoning us to go on. We clutched our guitars and stumbled on to the stage.

Three hundred students watched us with curiosity as we plugged in. Then we launched into *Wonderful Land,* and they started jiving. It wasn't very spirited, but at least they were responding.

It was the same kind of moment as when you learn to swim or ride a bicycle. The moment that you realize you can do it, and the only remaining problem is how well you can do it.

Wonderful Land ground to a halt and there was a polite applause. Mel walked across to the mike and stood there for a moment, pink and speechless.

'Thank-you-ladies-and-gentlemen-and-now-we'd-like-to-play-*Apache.'*

It came out in a graceless schoolboy rush. I realized that although Mel might have the purse strings I had it over him on stage. Stan covered Mel's confusion by briskly laying into his tom-toms and starting us into *Apache.*

My nerves had gone, and with Stan forcing the pace a little I was beginning to enjoy myself. I tried a few mean bass guitarist struts and found they came easy. I looked round at Mel. He was standing awkwardly rigid, staring at his fingerboard as though terrified of

making a mistake. Pete was almost hidden at the back of the stage, strumming earnestly.

I moved to the front of the stage, it was me, I was in control, I was the one they were looking at. I began to swing my bass in time to the drums.

As we finished *Apache,* I went straight into *Walk Don't Run,* leaving no pause for the polite clapping or another of Mel's lame announcements. Stan picked up behind me and we raced off, carrying Mel and Pete with us.

The next number on Mel's list was *Sleepwalk.* He had thought it wise to do a slow one, and as *Walk Don't Run* finished I walked to the mike before Mel could get there.

A line Jerry Lee Lewis had used at a concert sprang into my mind.

'We're going to play a real slow one, so you can all get —comfortable.'

The second-hand joke even got a laugh, and, well pleased, I counted us into *Sleepwalk.*

All through it, I kept to the front of the stage. Standing quite still, legs braced. Looking at the audience through half closed eyes that I imagined was sort of Elvis-sexy. When we finished I stepped up to the mike again.

'All right, we're gonna leave you with some real rock and roll.'

Mel managed to get through an almost note perfect reproduction of Chuck Berry's intro and we stormed into *Johnny B. Goode.* It was far heavier than anything else we had done since Mel and Pete were both playing the basic riff.

I gripped my bass and took a deep breath.

Way down Louisiana close to New Orleans.

My own voice was coming back at me out of Mel's spare amp. The sense of power flooded through me, I began to snap my knee like Presley. It was an electric feeling, like the moment on the beach when Penny told me I could have her, only this time I was in control.

I strutted backwards as Mel played his first break, and then forward again to take the next verse. Mel appeared to have loosened up a little, and even Pete was now actually visible and tapping his foot. The beatniks had begun the stomp they normally reserved for trad bands. It really seemed like we were winning.

In the last chorus, I signalled to Stan to keep repeating the *Go Johnny go* part. Mel looked terrified when he realized we were deviating from the set way we had rehearsed the song, and casting him loose in a sea of improvisation. After floundering about for a couple of bars he fell in behind and Stan and I led the band to a rocking finish.

We left the stage to a round of healthy applause. Even Pete seemed elated, and Mel didn't bitch about the liberties I had taken in the last song.

As the trad band started up we swaggered into the hail, confident that we had made our mark in the college.

We were the rock and roll band.

An hour and a half later, in the garden between the hail and the dark I found that we hadn't generated enough charisma for Karen from first year painting to let me put my hand under her skirt, although she did seem quite pleased for the bold rock and roller to stroke her breasts.

After the college dance, we began to be offered a few other dates. We played at school hops, youth club dances, and outlying village halls. Mel began to find his feet, and the trouble started.

It was early in the spring, at some kind of teenage hop in a little village about ten miles out of town, when the first problems really came to a head.

Ever since the success of *Johnny B. Goode* at that first dance, Stan and I had been pressing Mel to let us play more rockers, and he had given way to the point where we were playing only about half instrumentals. The fact that he had backed down didn't, however, mean he liked the situation.

On the day of the village hall gig, I had developed a raging toothache, and by the time that Stan's brother picked us up in his bread van to take us out to the place I was taking half a codeine every hour to kill the pain.

To hide my swollen jaw I was wearing dark glasses, and when it was time to go on I decided to keep on wearing them.

It was obvious that Mel didn't approve, and his disapproval became more noticeable when I lit a cigarette at the start of *Sleepwalk.*

Up until the time we had gone on stage, I had been gobbling more and more codeines and washing them down with mouthfuls of light ale. Towards the end of *Walk Don't Run* I began to feel decidedly odd. We made a start on *FBI,* and suddenly -the world became two-dimensional, then black and white, and finally started to rush away from me at an alarming speed.

I blacked out.

They told me later that I had toppled, bass and all, off the little stage like a failing tree into the front rows of jiving yokels, who apparently found the spectacle highly entertaining.

Mel, it seemed, had grabbed the mike, stammered a lot of weak excuses, and I had been dragged into the back room, where I woke up.

The first thing I saw was Mel, red-faced and uptight.

'You really made fools of us all, didn't you?'

I struggled to focus my eyes and groaned.

'Leave it out, I feel sick.'

But Mel was determined to ram home the point. 'With those glasses, and collapsing like that, you've probably convinced all those people that you're a drug addict.'

'So?'

'So we don't need that kind of reputation.'

Stan came to my rescue.

'Why not?'

Mel turned on him.

'Because it's bad for the group. People will probably stop booking us. Thanks to you two we're already notorious for being loud and coarse.'

I could see that Stan was not far from taking a swing at Mel so I tried to cool things out a little.

'Listen, it seems to be going down okay, so I don't see what all the trouble's about. We're not the Shadows and I don't see we have to work so fucking hard at being the good guys.'

Mel wasn't going to leave it alone, though.

'I don't see why we have to work at building an image of being degenerates and criminals.'

Stan made a grab for him.

'Listen cunt...'

Before they could start hitting each other Pete stepped between them.

'We'd better go and play a bit more, otherwise we won't get paid.'

In the van on the way home, Stan and I made an effort to placate Mel, who was sitting in the back hunched in solid silence.

We agreed that we would start working on some rubbishy instrumental which he had written instead of polishing up Gene Vincent's *Say Mama,* which Stan and I badly wanted to do.

For a while, things went smoothly until the incident of the suits.

It was the Easter vacation and we had arranged to rehearse in some cruddy Scout hut near where Stan lived. Mel showed up about half an hour late, which was unusual, since normally be arrived before anyone else and sat around fretting. He walked in like the cat full of

proverbial cream.

'I've got some great news!'

'Yeah, what?'

'We're going to have stage suits.'

'Stage suits? What do you mean?'

'Suits, to wear on stage. My mother agreed to pay for them and it's all arranged. I picked out a really sharp grey Italian Suit at Wilson's and all you have to do is get measured up.'

'What?' .

'We're all going to have matching Suits.'

'Jesus Christ!'

Stan and I looked at each other, then at Mel.

'We're all getting matching suits?'

'Right.'

'Grey?'

'That's right, and grey winkle pickers and red shirts.' Stan thought for a moment.

'I don't really like playing in a jacket. It gets too hot.' Mel beamed.

'It'll be okay if you take it off.'

From the incident of the suits, things went steadily downhill. The suits gave Mel something to bitch about constantly, how we didn't look after them, did we really have to throw our jackets on the stage? It wasn't enough to split the group up, but it was tiresome, and convinced me that although we were making a bit of pocket money, there was little chance of it going much further.

It was in this frame of mind that I sent off my application to one of the bigger London art schools. With the grant, it meant that I could get away from both the band and my old man, and seek new horizons in the big city.

Towards the end of the summer term confirmation came that I had both a place in the London college and a full living grant. This meant that after September I would definitely no longer be in the band.

I discussed the situation with Mel, Pete and Stan and it was decided that I would stay with them until I moved to London, and in the meantime they would look round for a new bass player.

The summer vacation came. I continued to go to gigs with the group and the hassles with Mel all but ceased because, since I was leaving anyway, it was now too much trouble to argue. It would probably have all ended amicably except that I met Sally, and Sally hatched her plot to unhinge Mel.

I'd seen Sally before, of course, in a small town you couldn't really miss her. She had enormous tits.

She had at one time been going with a precocious classmate of mine, and the word had gone round the school that she would do it sometimes, maybe.

The Bardot pout and the aforementioned breasts meant that she was always surrounded by a crowd of the ace studs competing for her favours, and, as an insignificant schoolboy, I stood no chance at all.

She had left school at the same time as I, but instead of staying in the town she had left to go to secretarial college in London.

I had forgotten all about her until one day during that last summer before I left for London I met her in the High Street. I smiled and said hello. After all, I was no longer an insignificant schoolboy. I was the fab bass guitarist.

I took her to coffee. I took her to the pictures. I even took her for walks in the country

where she let me fondle her body, gave me hand jobs, but wouldn't let me make her. I took her to a couple of gigs, and that was my mistake. Mel took one look at Sally's breasts, decided she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and from then on he showed all the symptoms of unrequited love.

'I've had a lover for every year of my life.'

Sally and I were lying side by side on a deserted beach. The sun had gone down leaving a red glow in the western sky. She had removed her bikini top and I was kissing her beautiful breasts when she suddenly came out with it. I sat up and looked at her.

'What?'

'I've had a lover for every year of my life.'

Today this statement would sound pretentious and unreal, but for a seventeen-year-old whose idea of excitement was a coffee bar (remember coffee bars? A juke box, a rubber plant and a neon-lit espresso machine) it was the pinnacle of daring sophistication. I tried an equally daring reply.

'You haven't had me.'

'That's true.'

'Why don't you? Why not right now?'

She thought for a while.

'No, not yet.'

I went back to kissing her tit. Suddenly she sat up. I rolled over on my back.

'What's the matter?'

'I was just thinking. I read something by Simone de Beauvoir, she said a woman had a virginity of body and a virginity of spirit. Do you believe that?'

'I don't know, I've never thought much about virginity. I just wanted to lose mine.'

'It's different for men. It's always different for men.'

I stared at her nipple. It was covered in a smudge of sand, clinging to where my mouth had made it damp.'

'I suppose you're right.'

There was a long silence. Sally gazed out to sea, obviously deep in thought.

'I think I'm going to have a party. My parents are going away for two weeks and leaving me with the house.'

'Yeah, when?'

'Next week.'

'When will you have the party?'

She looked at me as though I was very stupid.

'For the whole two weeks of course. You can move in.'

'Will you have me then?'

'Maybe.'

It was strange waking up that first morning with Sally. For long moments I had great difficulty orientating myself. I couldn't believe that I was really in this double bed with this warm, sleeping girl.

I had told my parents that I was going hitch-hiking with a friend. Then, the previous day, I had packed a few things and moved in to Sally's parents' house. We had sat round all evening watching TV, then, about midnight, we had gone to bed. She had undressed in front of me. an unspoken signal that finally we were going to make it.

That first time with Sally wasn't quite the disaster that screwing Penny on the beach had been, but it was no great success. At first Sally had been annoyed, but then she had laughed at

my discomfiture.

'You really don't know much about fucking, do you?' I shook my head, I felt about twelve years old.

'No, I suppose not.'

She rolled over on her stomach, elbows on the pillow, her chin resting in her cupped hands.

'I had this spade once, he was a junkie and he kept at me for eight hours.'

'Eight hours?'

'Well, maybe it just felt like it.'

'I suppose I must have felt like eight seconds.'

She turned on her side to face me.

'Don't sulk. You just get over excited.'

She wriggled and fondled my limp penis.

'After all, we can always try again.'

As her hands worked on me, I gradually became harder. The second time was a hundred times better than the first.

As I lay beside Sally that first morning, I remembered her grinning in the darkness of the night before.

'The first time was yours, but the second time was definitely mine.'

Sally spent the morning phoning friends while I wandered around the place, mixing impossible drinks from her father's cocktail bar. It seemed an ideal life. In the evening a lot of people showed up, and, like at most teenage parties of that time, they necked and got drunk while Little Richard or Adam Faith blasted out of the radiogram. The more adventurous couples disappeared into the bedroom, and when Sally and I decided to go to bed we had to eject one of her school friends who had retired there with a guy who worked at the public library.

In the morning, when we finally came downstairs, we were greeted by the sight of sleeping bodies and debris. Sally rushed round waking everyone up, while I had a shower. At home we didn't have a shower, and standing under the jet of water, turning alternately from as hot to as cold as I could stand, seemed, together with sleeping with Sally, the height of sensuality and sophistication.

After I had dried myself I came down into the living room to find a scene of frenzied clearing up. I poured myself yet another helping of Sally's father's vodka, and then, to show willing, trundled a hoover around the carpet for about five minutes.

The women disappeared into the kitchen, and the men sat round in the living room trading hints and innuendoes about the previous night's sexual adventures, until we were summoned to plates of bacon and eggs in the kitchen.

Life at Sally's went on in the same manner. We cleared up the mess each morning, people came and went. A few times we went out, but on one of these excursions I had to dodge into a doorway to avoid coming face to face with my parents, who thought I was miles away, and for the most part we stayed in the house or garden. Drinking, laughing and screwing, except on the couple of occasions that Sally refused, I think to assert her independence.

I suppose for a lot of that fortnight I was bored. Sally and I had a couple of fights, a few of the guys, at one point, dressed up in her mother's clothes, and another time fell to throwing buckets of water over each other.

We hid it very well, deceiving ourselves that we were some kind of junior jet set, but beneath all the sexy lying about there was a solid layer of boredom, and I think it was, that boredom that led to the final incident that finished off all amicable relations with Mel.

Sally and I were lying in bed one night. It was one of those warm nights when sleep is impossible. We were hot and damp from balling, and where our skin touched it was moist

and sticky. For a long time we lay in silence, then Sally sat up and lit a cigarette.

'What'll happen to your group when you come to London?'

'I don't know, they'll probably get someone else. I don't really care, I'm pissed off with them.'

'Yeah? Why's that?'

'Oh, it's Mel, he's a pain in the arse.'

'Is he the big awkward one who walks round looking like a sheep?'

I laughed.

'That's him. He's a real fucking idiot. Did you know he's hopelessly in love with you?'

Her eyebrows shot up.

'What?'

'He reckons you're the most wonderful thing on God's earth.'

She pushed her lips into the Bardot pout and let her hair fall over her face.

'Well, aren't I?'

'Sure, but this berk walks around like a sick cow. He chokes on his Adam's apple every time your name's mentioned. What makes it worse is that he's never been near a chick, the poor fucker doesn't have a clue. All he does is complain and bitch about it. Then he gives me and Stan a hard time.'

'He sounds a right cunt.'

'You could say that.'

'Somebody ought to fix him.'

'Sure.'

I snuggled up to her.

'Why don't you fix me?'

I started kissing Sally and forgot all about Mel and his hang-ups.

Mel stayed forgotten until a couple of days later when I told Sally I was going to ring Stan and invite him over.

'Why don't you get the whole group round, they could bring some instruments.'

'What, even Mel?'

'Yeah, why not?'

I was reluctant, he wouldn't be an asset to the party.

'You sure?'

'Yes, invite the poor guy, it might bring him out of himself.'

I shrugged.

'Okay, if you're feeling charitable.'

I phoned the other three. Pete was out, but Mel and Stan said they'd be over later.

Mel showed up with an acoustic guitar under his arm. I was grateful for that, at least while he was playing he wouldn't talk. Stan arrived a while later and we sat around singing and playing all the songs we could think of. At least it was amicable if not riotous fun.

As the afternoon turned into evening more people began to arrive and for a while I lost track of Sally. Then she marched in with a determined look on her face. She had changed her dress and was now wearing what she called her vamping dress. One of those black shiny sheath dresses that you see Marilyn Monroe wearing in old publicity stills.

Swinging her hips and pouting she walked up to the radio-gram and put on *Da Do Ron Ron* by the Crystals, then over to where Mel was sitting and asked him if he wanted to dance. I could hardly stop laughing, as Mel went red and looked as though he was hoping the floor would swallow him.

Sally hauled him to his feet and steered him to the middle of the floor and then pressed herself against him in a kind of static creep while he blushed to the roots of his hair and

tumbled about trying to avoid Sally's feet.

I couldn't stand trying to repress my laughter and I went into the kitchen to get a beer from the fridge. When I got back, Mel and Sally had disappeared.

Although I was curious about what she was up to, I didn't think much more about it and started talking to Stan and his bird. Then Mel came rushing into the room looking like the Phantom of the Opera, grabbed his guitar and raced out of the front door without a word to anyone.

A few minutes later Sally came in giggling helplessly.

'What did you do to Mel?' She shook her head.

'I'll tell you later.'

'I took him to bed.'

It wasn't until we were in bed that Sally would tell me what the had done to make Mel bolt out of the house.

I sat up.

'You did what?'

'I screwed him.'

I lay down again, I could think of nothing to say. The picture was too much to imagine.

'Why?'

'I thought he needed a lesson so I had him. Then afterwards F told him how useless he was at it. He looked like he was going to choke. It was so funny.'

I shook my head in disbelief. Sally cuddled up to me.

'You're not cross, are you?'

The way she was wrapping her legs around me made it a Little difficult to get angry.

You can hear me talkin'
See me walkin'
Life goes on outside.
I keep on drinkin'
Don't do much thinkin'
I still got my pride.

It's a kind of country shuffle that makes strutting on the front of the stage easy. Jerry is knocking out a hard country lick while Mac has changed guitars in order to play bottleneck.

The kids in the basement
They're all wasted.
The man comes round each day.
Need a prescription
Some description
To make things go away.

There seems to be a very positive identification among the audience with the kids in the basement. And the word prescription always gets a response. Sometimes I wonder if the kids are looking for music, or drug abuse by proxy. Other times I wonder if I care.

Jerry moves up to his mike to do the chorus.

Oh Annie, won't you take me back again?
Oh Annie, won't you help me ease the pain?
I don't need your tits
I don't need your mind
I need some stuff an' it's hard to find.
Oh Annie, won't you take me back again?

Jerry bounces away from his mike, and I unhook mine from the stand and mince forward, right to the front of the stage for the second verse.

I know you did it
So where you hid it?
I'm looking straight at you.
I know you got some
1 ain't dumb
An' you know I want some too.

A flicker from the footlights catches my eye, and there's a demented bopper flying towards me, arms out, fingers clawing. I duck and sidestep, and she is fielded by Chas and one of Roth's flunkies and tossed off at the side.

You have to watch out for those little swine. If they get a hand on you, they're reluctant to let go without taking at least a chunk of scalp with them.

Avoiding the bopper has made me miss a couple of lines, and for a moment I've lost it. I glance at Jerry, who's moving up again for the chorus. I take my cue from him, and we're back together.

We do another chorus, and then Mac takes his bottleneck solo. I swing the mike over my head, feeding out cable until it's a seven-foot arc. Mike swinging serves a dual purpose, it looks good, and if another little jailbait rushes me, the mike will take her teeth out.

I notice Roth has positioned a few more of his minions at the edge of the stage, in case a whole bunch of the kiddies start rushing the footlights.

There's a flash as a falling object catches the light.

Panic!

Then in the same instant I realize it's just a paper dart. It probably contains some dumb message. 'Jerry I love you,' or 'Mac I want to ball you,' it depends on the honesty of the writer. There was a time when Chas used to gather up all the crap that was thrown on the stage, but nobody bothers any more.

That first autumn in London, and the break from my little old home town, was a strange experience. The city was huge, so filled with people that it seemed constantly in motion, and to make contact looked almost like an impossibility.

I had made the mistake of going to what was known as 'approved student accommodation', which turned out to be a big house in Bayswater filled with trainee accountants and a group of whining first year drama students. None of them seemed to have anything in common with me, and those first couple of weeks were a long lonely haul through non-contacts and worthless conversations.

I began to go and see Sally a lot, in her tiny attic in Hampstead, and for about. two weeks I virtually lived with her. But boredom overtook us as we increasingly found that our relationship back at home had been based on a common desire to escape, and now we were free there really wasn't too much between us. Her Hampstead friends who came on strong with their Hemingway and their Zoot Simms albums drove a wedge so far between us that all we 'had had in those two weeks back home seemed to shatter and split.

Even the college was hard at first. It was vast and over-organized, and as a new student I found myself treated like a unit. At home the teachers had been friends, it had been first name terms, but in London it was Mr Francis, it seemed that nobody was going to call me Lou again.

In the middle of October I bought a bottle of Scotch and stayed in bed for three days. and went to look for consolation from a Paddington hooker who turned out to be fat, forty and adept at dispatching clients in seven minutes fiat.

The isolation didn't last as long ~ I feared. In the end, finding a new gang to hang out with was really quite simple. I joined a poker game in the common room, and after spending all day and losing a couple of pounds, I found I had struck up a warm relationship with two of the guys in the game.

Stew had a very similar background to mine, except he came from Lancashire, but his stories of northern rockers and small time beat groups sounded an exact parallel to what I had been through on the south coast.

Tony, on the other hand, was a militant Londoner, with a city kid's confidence and the added advantage of bearing a strong resemblance to the young George Harrison. He seemed to view the civilization of us hicks as his divine mission, and with that in mind he took us around to see the sights. We saw Alexis Korner and the embryonic Rolling Stones at the Marquee and Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames playing Ray Charles to the sweating niggers at the Flamingo Alniters. He turned us on to music that was a stage beyond the rock and roll that we were used to. We began to hear Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, jazz musicians like Blakey, Roland Kirk and Mingus. Stew also had a wealth of experience that he opened to us. He had hung round with folk musicians in the north, and he introduced me to records of Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and the hard British miners' songs.

From being a maze of lonely streets, London quickly became a wonderland of expanding horizons.

In mid November, Tony, Stew and I moved into a damp basement in Holland Park, and we began gradually to fall out of the college.

We went to parties, we got drunk, and, as our grant cheques ran out, we hustled and starved, living for weeks on what we could nick from the supermarket, and meals that the various girls who came round could be conned into buying or cooking.

Our situation with women improved by leaps and bounds. It seemed as though three young

studs, living in their own pad, sleazy as it was, couldn't go wrong, particularly when one bore an amazing resemblance to a Beatle.

From the procession of one night stands three became regular visitors, and then more or less moved in, at least on a part time basis.

Carole and Janet lived in a fiat together in Notting Hill. They were students in the fashion department, and after they had been coming round for a week or so, it became apparent that they were attaching themselves pretty closely to Tony and me, while at the same time, Stew had found himself a steady companion in Wendy, a quiet, mousey little girl from the painting school.

The fact that Carole and Janet were friends meant that Tony, I, and the two of them went around as a foursome, while Stew and Wendy became increasingly separated. Even the layout of the flat was changed, with Stew taking the small back bedroom, while Tony and I moved into the larger front room.

Stew's drifting away from Tony and me was tactfully put down to Wendy's desire for privacy, but, although it was never admitted, Stew himself had a strong streak of northern working class prudery that was always threatened by Carole's overt exhibitionism.

Carole, who at the time was furiously devouring Ginsberg, Kerouac and Norman Mailer, would take her clothes off at the slightest provocation, and although she was sleeping with Tony, she and I struck up a relationship based on the fact that the only class at college that held any real interest for me was photography, and that Carole loved being looked at.

I'd book out a Pentax from the college, and spend hours and miles of thirty-five mil film taking pictures of Carole.

I think Janet was secretly very jealous of these sessions with Carole. It was obvious that Carole made all the running for the two of them, and I think Janet would have been quite happy conventionally to go steady, but her dependence ~on Carole meant she allowed herself to be dragged headlong into her friend's conception of a free-loving beatnik life.

Carole's idea of hipster freedom was completed one night when Tony came home looking exceptionally pleased with himself.

'Guess what I've got.'

Carole looked up from the TV.

'What?'

'Grass.'

At first it didn't register.

'Huh?'

'Grass.'

Still we didn't grasp what he meant.

'Grass, what do you mean, grass?'

Tony looked pityingly at me, the look he reserved for people who acted like hicks.

'Marijuana, cannabis, dope, shit, grass, dope. You know what I mean?'

'And you got some?'

He pulled out a small newspaper wrapped package from his inside pocket.

'Sure have.'

Carole took the package, unwrapped it carefully and sniffed it.

'Are we going to smoke some?'

'That's the general idea.'

'You done it before?'

'A couple of times, with some spades I know from the Flamingo.'

Tony took the package, and carefully rolled a rather inexpert joint, lit it and passed it to Carole.

‘Get the smoke right down into your lungs, and hold it there for as long as you can.’

Carole took a huge hit and exploded in a fit of coughing.

‘Jesus.’

Tony grinned.

‘Take it a bit easier.’

Carole tried again with more success, and passed the joint to me. I looked at it and for a tiny instant visions of drug addiction, Frank Sinatra in *Man with the Golden Arm,* flashed across my mind, but they were quickly swept away by curiosity.

I took my first hit of dope, and at first nothing happened. But as the evening went on I suddenly realized, when I stood up to take a piss, that I was stoned out of my mind.

I suppose it was the combination of the dope and Carole’s quest for adventure that led to the night when we started swapping partners.

It began as a joke. It’s always easier to start things under a guise of humour, it gives you the chance to back off if they get out of hand. I’m pretty sure it was Carole who suggested it.

‘Let’s do Stew’s head in.’

Stew and Wendy were out at a movie, but expected home soon.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I thought if we pulled the two beds together, and we were lying there when he came in, like we were having a four in hand orgy, it would really bother his puritanism.’

Tony grinned.

‘It’d bother Wendy even more, prim little cow.’

‘Let’s do it then, he’ll be home soon.’

We began stumbling around, pulling mattresses about and giggling. Only Janet looked a little dubious.

‘Don’t you think it’s going a bit far?’

‘No, it’s only a giggle.’

We all undressed and climbed into the superbed. Janet immediately snuggled up to me at one end, but Carole sat up.

‘Listen, it isn’t going to be any fun if it’s just the two usual couples at each end of the bed. Here Jan, you move up here with Tony, and I’ll get comfortable with Lou.’

The two girls scrambled over each other, and I found myself with my arms round Carole.

‘Hello.’

‘Hello.’

For a while we lay facing each other wondering what to do, then a rustling from the other end of the bed made us look round. Tony seemed to be taking his part in the charade very seriously, grappling with Janet who, although she didn’t look terribly enthusiastic, lay with her eyes shut, not resisting in any way. Carole nuzzled my ear and whispered.

‘They seem to be getting acquainted.’

‘Yeah.’

She ran her fingernails down the inside of my thigh.

‘How about us?’

I kissed her, and very soon we were grappling as bard as the other two. Harder. in fact, since Carole did a lot more positive things than just lie unresisting. and when Stew and Wendy did finally come in, I was too busy keeping up with the energetic demands of Carole’s eagerly bucking pelvis to appreciate the supposed joke.

When we had finished, Carole lay on her back between me and Janet. After a few minutes she rolled over and began earnestly kissing her. Tony and I stared at each other in surprise. ‘

At first Janet appeared to respond, but when Carole’s hand snaked down towards her thighs. Janet leaped up and announced that she had to go to the bathroom. When she returned she pointedly climbed into the far side of the bed, so I was firmly between her and the other

two.

After about half an hour, she allowed me to ball her, but only when she was certain that Carole and Tony were doing it as well, and wouldn't be watching.

After the attempt at the orgy, Janet started to come round less and less often. Carole reported that she had found herself a new buddy at college. and very soon she had dropped out of my life altogether.

For the next few months a situation developed where Tony, Carole and I seemed to be the main family, and I brought home a procession of girls, most of whom didn't come back after Carole had attempted to gross them out.

The constant shortage of money began to cause awkward scenes with the landlord, and after Stew moved out, it became very obvious that our days in the flat were numbered. Janet moved out from Carole's flat, and after we received our final notice to quit, Tony decided that the simplest thing for him was to move in with Carole. From my point of view this was a shame, because since the four-in-the-bed incident I had been balling Carole on the odd occasion that Tony wasn't around.

With Tony moving to Notting Hill, I had no alternative but to start looking for a new place.

Very little of the outside world seemed to enter those months I spent in the flat with Stew and Tony. I can remember the news coming through the TV of how Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, and the newsreel film of Lee Harvey Oswald being gunned down a couple of days later.

We saw the Beatles on television as they rose to dizzy fame, but little else seemed to matter apart from drink, screwing, the new found joys of dope, and avoiding efforts to make us go to college. I even did very little with my guitar. But just before we moved out, a friend of Stew's came round with an album that jolted me into thinking that maybe a whole lot more could be done with rock and roll than I had previously imagined. The album was by an American folk singer called Bob Dylan, and for weeks I wondered if it was pronounced Dillan or Dielan.

There was a card in the newsagent's. It was very simple:

Rooms — three pounds, and an address.

Later the same evening I went round there. It was an old crumbling terrace house in Ladbroke Grove, grey and dilapidated. A high privet hedge at the front gave it an almost horror movie gloom. I walked up the steps and rang the bell.

The door opened about six inches, and a small furtive Chinese peered out.

'Yes?'

I've come about a room.'

'You want room?'

Uh — yes.'

'Is three pounds a week.'

'Yes, that's okay. Do you have any vacant?'

The door opened another foot to reveal a hallway, dimly lit by a forty-watt bulb.

'I come, I show.'

I followed the man up the stairs to the first floor. The house smelled of decay and old cabbage. The Chinese fumbled with a huge bunch of keys, and ushered me into the first floor back.

'This is room.'

I looked around. It was filthy, and shared the smell of the rest of the house. The walls were the colour of dirty creme caramel, there was a double bed with dark grey blankets and light grey sheets, a sink, a gas ring and a huge Victorian wardrobe with carvings and mirrors. The

floor was covered with brown lino and a small worn rug of indeterminate colour. The room was hideous, but I needed some place to live.

'Are there any restrictions?'

The Chinaman shrugged.

'If you make trouble I throw you out.'

'When can I move in?'

'Now.'

'And, er, how much would you want if I moved in straight away?'

'Three pound. That pays rent to Monday.'

That clinched it. The fact that he didn't want key money or a month's deposit made the place suddenly seem ideal.

'I'll take it.'

I handed him three pound notes, he pulled out a blank rent book and began filling it in.

'Name?'

'Lou Francis.'

'I put the first payment in the book. You pay again Monday, and here is key.'

I took the key and the rent book, and the Chinaman left me standing in the middle of the room wondering if I'd made a ghastly mistake. Then I locked the door behind me, pocketed the keys and went to spend my last night in the old flat.

The room looked even worse in daylight, when I brought my stuff over from the old place the next day. Everything seemed to be covered in a fine layer of elderly grease. I dumped my bags and cases and went to the pub.

Over the next few weeks things began looking up. I did a deal with the Chinaman, whose name turned out to be Lee, that he'd give me the paint so I could redecorate the place. It took a little time, but at the end of two weeks the place looked clean and white and Lee was delighted and went round smiling and nodding. It seemed that the rest of his tenants were Irish winos, who rarely stayed for more than a week, and he was overjoyed with the prospect of one who not only seemed liable to stay, but also redecorated his room.

Lee was a strange, secretive little guy who lived totally alone on the ground floor. He seemed never to have visitors, and nobody in the house had ever been in his room, although, from the few brief glimpses I had had while paying the rent, it seemed that the entire room was crammed with oriental junk.

One of the paddies told me in all earnestness that Lee had his father's body stashed in his room while he saved enough money to ship it back to China.

It was the summer vacation again, and to alleviate the dire money situation I took a job as a short order cook, and settled into a pattern of life where I spent all day sweating over a hamburger grill, and most nights replacing the lost moisture. The additional money did mean that I was able to acquire a whole lot of things that student poverty had denied me. I scored all the mundane things like new jeans, new boots, a leather jacket. and I began buying Dylan records as fast as they came out. I also sold my bass guitar and amplifier, and bought a reasonably good acoustic jumbo.

Towards the middle of August I had enough money stashed, and I quit the greasy spoon, paid the man a month's rent, and with my guitar and sleeping bag I set out for the West Country.

Third number and all's well, the paranoia ebbing away. If some psychopath was going to shoot us, he would have done it by now.

I march up to the mike to tell them about the song. 'This is something you fuckers should know all about, you gotta get down on Friday night.'

There's a roar, *Friday Night* was a big hit single. Jerry goes into what is basically an elaboration of an Eddie Cochran riff. I stomp backwards waving the mike stand above my head, then forward again to start the verse.

Working all week
For a boss who's a slob,
Picked up my money,
Must forget that job.

Throw away the stand, it narrowly misses Mac who glares at me, and start working with the hand mike.

Got a bottle of wine
An' a handful of reds,
An' if I don't get laid
Might as well be dead
On Friday night.

Jerry and Mac come in for call and response.

Yeah Friday night
Come on baby
Yeah Friday night
Let's go crazy -
Yeah Friday night
Get what I need
Yeah Friday night
Gonna watch you bleed
Yeah Friday night
Friday night
Yeah Friday night
Friday night.

Jerry smashes into what is reserved as his big spot. He's hammering his guitar, swinging his arm like Townshend. Lurching and rocking right in the front and centre of the stage, legs spread, hips pushed forward, a unique combination of sex and just-try-it-you-mother fuckers.

Towards the end of Jerry's solo, I begin creeping towards Jerry, and with a lurch that owes a lot to the *Return of Frankenstein* he turns to face me. We advance on each other like stylized gunfighters. Jerry and I seem to have a natural thing of creating a kind of machismo fighting cock tension. We are only about a foot apart, and Jerry has the glazed look that even frightens me sometimes. When he gets that look, it's all too easy to imagine him going silently berserk and killing about twenty-six people.

I swing round, and find that Chas put the mike and stand back into exactly the right position. Chas is better rehearsed than anyone else in the band.

I start yelling the second verse while Jerry totters backwards and crashes against his wall of

amplifiers. Again,
right on cue, Chas is there with another of his team, holding them so they don't fall over.

Got a bottle of wine
And a bunch of reds.
If I don't get laid
1 oughta be dead
On Friday night
Yeah Friday night
Going to town -
Yeah Friday night
Nobody put me down
Yeah Friday night
Get down darling
Yeah Friday night
Get down baby
Yeah Friday night
Get down bitch you drive me crazy
Yeah Friday night
On Friday night
Yeah Friday night -
On Friday night — yeah, you gotta get down.

The band instantly falls away and tucks itself in behind a kind of Duane Eddy riff which Jerry and Steve are putting down.

'Down!'

I walk slowly towards the front of the stage. It's a sort of Morrison routine.

'Real quiet.'

Jerry and Mac lay back a lot more. It's pure melodrama.

'Right down.'

Then a bit campy.

'That feels really nice.'

Jerk back to macho.

'Alright, let's get this room together.'

Drums begin to ease.

'You fuckers out there think you're gonna get off by sitting there?'

I start to move along the very edge of the stage. If I don't do this right I'm gone.

'You fuckers think you'll get any pussy if you don't shake your arses?'

I'm yelling now.

'Shit, I gotta work for it.'

I'm almost to the edge of the stage.

'You chicks think you'll get anything together just sitting there?'

I back up against the pillar, right at the side.

'Call this a party?'

The band starts to build.

'Call this a good time?'

Jerry has moved to front and centre.

'Come on!'

The band gets louder and faster.

'Come on!'

The front rows are on their feet.

'I SAID COME ON!'

A whole crowd of them are rushing straight at me. I jump back on to the main part of the stage, and the whole stage crew moves forward at a pre-arranged signal to push them back.

'Fucking sheep.'

Jerry yells into his mike and storms into the second break. He is unbelievably loud, as if he is trying to push the struggling, punching mass beside the stage back by sheer weight of sound.

So there I was on the road. Doing the Woody Guthrie thing, with guitar on my back, fifteen pounds in my pocket and an ounce of grass hidden in the lining of my sleeping bag.

I felt exhilarated at the sense of freedom, the liberty to go exactly where my fancy dictated. It was the romance of all those Kerouac novels, although during the first few days I did begin to see the other side of the rambling life. The pubs and cafes with signs saying 'No beatniks', the long hours waiting for a lift, and the middle-aged homosexuals who cruised the common hitchhiking routes looking to cop a quick feel in return for a free ride.

I hitched for two days, unrolling my sleeping bag in fields when I got tired. On the third day I was in the north Devon town of Ilfracombe, and tried my hand at busking on the sea front. I only made about ten shillings, but I did meet two nurses who had a holiday flat there, and they took me home, fed me, and one of them, her name was Sue, ministered to my needs for the next couple of days.

She was a Dylan fan, and I think I was the closest she ever got to the real thing, but after two days her disciplined mind began to reassert itself, and the fact that I was balling her and eating her food didn't seem enough to make me put up with her increasing probing as to how come I didn't settle down and make a career for myself.

I set out heading south and west, and by the evening I was in Cornwall. I spent the evening playing guitar in a country pub where I scored thirty bob and a bunch of drinks, then unrolled my sleeping bag in a clump of trees and crashed out for the night.

In the morning I was picked up by a commercial traveller who took me across Bodmin moor and dropped me off in a little seaside town called St Austell.

I wandered into a cheap cafe on the harbour and had a meal, then sat down on the sea wall and started playing my guitar, not busking, just playing for my own entertainment.

I'd been sitting there for about half an hour, and was about halfway through my dreadful version of Jesse Fuller's *San Francisco Bay Blues* when a voice from behind startled me into stopping and turning round.

'You play a rotten guitar.'

'Huh?'

'Your guitar playing's really rotten.'

A tall thin guy with shoulder length blond hair, which was quite unusual in those days, was standing there grinning at me. He was wearing the standard Comish beat uniform of blue jeans and fisherman's sweater.

I offered him the guitar.

'Can you play better?'

'Dunno, let's see.'

He took the guitar and settled himself on the wall.

'Want to sing if I play *San Francisco Bay?'*

I nodded.

'Sure.'

He played a nifty four-bar intro and I started singing along with him.

I got the blues for my baby left me by the San Francisco Bay.

His playing was a great deal better than mine, better even than either Pete's or Mel's. It was a novelty to sing with a good guitar player, I found I could do much more with my voice.

If she ever come back to stay
It'll be another brand new day
Walkin~' with my baby
Down by the San Francisco bay

We finished the song and he began a kind of finger picking shuffle. He played beautifully, and by the end of a number of people had gathered round to listen. As he finished the piece, he looked round the small crowd.

'Okay you lot, you've heard the music, what about a bit of bunce for the artiste, then?'

I hopped off the wall and went round with my hat. Most of the people shuffled off, but a few got out some change. We counted it out on the harbour wall, there was thirteen and sevenpence.

The guy laughed.

'Let's go to the pub.'

Over the first couple of drinks I learned that the guy's namewas Jerry Deacon, and that he lived in an old mine works on the edge of the moor.

'I had the idea of building stock cars, and began collecting all these old motors. I kept them in the biggest building. I must've had maybe thirty old heaps in there, but I went off the idea of building stockers and they just got left. Then the landlord started coming round and hassling me to pay some rent, so I took all the wheels off. When he saw all those fucking cars with no whec[1]s he didn't bother me anymore.'

He paused to drain the last of his pint.

'We'd better get some more drinks...'

He hesitated.

'…or listen, we could get a couple of bottles and head back to my place. There's these two American chicks staying at this boarding house down the Street. We could take them back with us. If you're not rushing off anyplace we could have a party for a few days.'

I nodded.

'Sure, it's okay with me.'

I found myself carried along by his leaping enthusiasm.

We climbed into his battered jeep, drove a short distance into the town and pulled up outside a house with a sign that said 'Bed and Breakfast'. Jerry jumped out of the jeep and vanished inside.

About ten minutes later he reappeared with two almost identical girls. They looked very American with their T-shirts, Levis, straight blonde hair and suntans. The two girls scrambled into the back of the jeep and Jerry jammed into gear. As we pulled away he jerked his thumb towards them.

'Lou, this is Cathy and that's Tricia. Ladies, this is Lou. You won't both have to make do with me from now on.'

I half turned in my seat.

'Hello.'

The two in the back grinned at me.

We drove through the countryside for about twenty minutes, until the tree-lined country lane gave way to the barer moorland, where we swung off on to a narrow rutted track.

We bounced along this dirt road for what seemed like miles, clinging to the sides of the jeep to stop being thrown out by Jerry's maniac driving.

Finally we turned on to an even rougher piece of track which led into a small valley at the end of which stood cluster of almost ruined buildings. As we came closer the place struck me as a strange combination of junk yard and gypsy camp.

The main buildings of the mine formed a square that was littered with rusty mining gear, old car bodies and an assortment of sundry rubbish that seemed to be the hunting ground of a few scrawny chickens. A touch of surrealism was added by the headless statue of a Victorian gentleman that stood in the middle of the square and had been daubed with fluorescent paint.

As we pulled to a halt, two large dogs, who looked as though a labrador and an alsatian

must have figured in their ancestry, rushed out at us barking and wagging their tails, an as he stepped out of the jeep they fell on Jerry with boisterous canine affection.

The two girls got a similar reception, and to avoid getting welcomed too, I walked off to have a closer look at the statue.

'Where did you get it from?'

Jerry looked up from playing with the dogs.

'I nicked it from a park one night when 1 was drunk. It took some getting into the truck.'

'Is that when the head came off?'

'No, no. That was later. I'll show you.'

He walked into the house and returned with a shotgun, and after shooing the dogs inside he called us over.

'Watch.'

He aimed the shotgun at the statue and the blast sent chunks of its shoulder flying through the air. He reloaded the gun and passed it to me.

'Here, you have a go.'

I took the gun and aimed it.

Blam!

A piece of its left arm fell away. After that, both Cathy and Tricia wanted to have a go, so

Jerry went inside and fetched another box of shells and we spent the next half hour blowing more pieces off the statue. It was only the dogs barking to be let out that forced us to stop, otherwise I think we would have reduced the statue to rubble right there and then.

Later that evening, after we had killed the bottle of wine we had bought in the pub, Jerry produced a bottle of Scotch from 'somewhere and we proceeded to get ourselves drunk.

Jerry's room was originally some kind of engine shed which he chose to live in because, of all the buildings, it had the soundest roof. It was as chaotic as the yard outside. Most of the floor was taken up with mattresses, blankets and piles of books and records, while one wall was stacked high with old radio sets he had hooked together to provide amplification for his Fender guitar and his record player. In a corner there was an oil stove, a cupboard containing food and a sink that contained at least a month's washing up. The rest of the wall space was filled with pictures and strange newspaper cuttings, and propped in corners were two more very good guitars.

From the amount of stuff lying round the place it seemed as though Jerry wasn't short of money. I tentatively tried to find out more about him.

'Do you live here all the time?'

He looked up from staring at a candle. He'd lit about seven, which, as we got drunker, became a genuine fire hazard.

'God no, it gets altogether too bleeding cold in the winter. I go back to London then.'

'You don't work at anything then, I mean to make bread?'

Jerry shook his head and grinned.

'No. I don't really have to. I used to be a child actor, you know, TV commercials, I used to eat cornflakes and look cute. I made a lot of money when I was ten, and my old woman tied it up so I've been getting about fifteen quid a week ever since.'

At the time I didn't believe him, but later I found out it was perfectly true.

After laughing at this story we lapsed back into silence, and Jerry plugged in his Fender and started playing. I hauled out my guitar, and he stopped.

'Do you know *Matchbox Blues?'*

I nodded.

'Sure, what key?'

He played a fast little run.

'Do it in E, if you stick to the straight chords, I'll fill in with the fancy bits. Okay?'

‘Okay.’

We played a verse, and I began singing.

Sittin’ here wonderin'
Matchbox for my clothes.

Jerry’s guitar bit in between the lines while I stuck resolutely to a simple rhythm. He was even better on electric than he had been on my old acoustic.

Sittin’ here wonderin’
Matchbox for my clothes.
1 got so many matches
But I/ sure got a long way to go.

On the second verse the two girls joined in. They had pleasant voices, and knew how to sing proper harmonies. After *Matchbox,* we played *He’s So Fine,* and let them do most of the singing. The music really brought us together.

At the end of the song, Cathy stood up and stretched.

‘There’s only one thing we need right now.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Some dope, that’s what.’ Tricia nodded.

‘This country may have the Beatles, but it’s sure fucked up for getting dope.’

I suddenly remembered the little package hidden in my sleeping bag, and leaned over and rummaged for it. I tossed it to Cathy.

‘Here, this should do.’

She carefully unwrapped it, smiling like a kid at Christmas.

‘Oh wow, grass!’

Jerry searched for some papers, and Cathy began rolling the small American kind of grass joint with one paper and all grass. It was the first time I had even seen one, having only smoked English style, three papers, tobacco and a cardboard roach.

Smoking these little American joints gets you stoned much quicker, and inside of an hour we were pretty much out of our minds. There seemed little to do but crash out, and I rolled over fully clothed and fell asleep.

I woke to someone nuzzling my ear. I opened my eyes, and for a moment I wondered where I was. Then my eyes focused on Cathy’s smiling face.

‘Do you always go to sleep with your clothes on?’ I blinked sleepily.

‘Dunno, I think I just fell over.’

I looked around. Cathy was lying next to me in a blanket on the same mattress. Only one candle was burning, and the room was a collection of dark shadows. In a corner I could see movements from a heap of blankets that I assumed was Tricia and Jerry. Cathy’s voice pulled me closer to being awake.

‘Why don’t you take your clothes off and then we can bed down properly?’

The soft invitation in her voice was tinged with a trace of impatience. I started to pull my boots off.

‘How long have I been asleep?’

‘An hour maybe.’

I struggled out of my jeans and shirt, and when I was naked, Cathy unwrapped herself from the blanket. She had no clothes on either, and her body gleamed golden in the candlelight. She crawled across to the candle and blew it out.

The darkness was total, without a single glimmer of light. I could hear Cathy moving towards me, and I sat on the mattress and waited. Her voice suddenly came softly from a point very close to my ear.

‘Hi boy, how are you?’

‘Fine.’

‘Good.’

I felt her lay her hand on my chest. I reached out and touched her hair, but her head seemed to be sinking. I thought at first that she was about to lie down, but then her hair brushed my legs and I felt her lips on my stomach. Her tongue gently explored my navel, and then began to move downwards. One of her hands lifted my penis, and I felt it engulfed by the warm moisture of her mouth. It was the first time I had ever had a blowjob, and the sensation was indescribable. I sank back on to the mattress with a sigh, and she moved with me. Her fingernails began to scratch my scrotum, and her mouth worked harder on my prick. I was now fully stiff and erect, and she clamped her teeth down, now squeezing, now relaxing and caressing the tip with her tongue.

It seemed to go on for an eternity.

Finally she let go of me and crawled up beside me, letting her breasts brush against my chest. Again her voice came quietly out of the darkness.

‘Did you like that?’

‘It was incredible.’

‘Do the same for me.’

Another first time. I moved my head down to her chest and took one of her breasts in my mouth, played with the nipple for a little while, then ran my tongue down to her navel, down the line of her stomach, and then began tentatively to nuzzle her soft flesh.

I was excited by the strange new taste, and began to tease and worry with my lips, tongue and teeth. She moaned and began to squirm, moving her pelvis more and more urgently, pressing down the length of her body, as though trying to bury my whole face in the sticky warmth of her flesh flower.

Then I couldn’t wait any longer, and surfaced and crawled forward until I was kneeling above her. Her fingers hooked into my back and she pulled me down on top of her, and impatiently reached between her legs to help me enter. We thrust against each other, our hips pressing together, rocking in a frenzied horizontal dance that writhed and contorted in the darkness. She locked her legs around me, and we rolled on our sides. Faster, higher, shuddering, our nails tearing at each other’s backs.

Then it all rushed out of me, she gave a strangled gasp, and; the tension ebbed out of us in small downward jolts that slowly faded away.

My mind came back to me, and as we lay, still entwined, I wondered how the women I met always seemed to know more, and lead me by the hand through all my love-making.

The girls stayed at Jerry’s place for another ten days, and that time with Cathy and Tricia taught me a great deal about living with women. The casual approach that they and Jerry had to relationships opened my eyes to there being a lot more beyond the standard ideas of love and marriage. It was very different from the situation with Tony, Janet and Carole; that had been a relationship that kicked at social conventions but still took them into account. Here, it seemed, they didn’t enter the picture at all. Nobody talked about love or expected anything from the future.

When the girls left, talking about heading for Paris, Jerry and I hung around the mine for another week, taking trips into nearby towns to get drunk and pull local scrubbers, but it was increasingly obvious that we were trying to perpetuate something that had ended when Tricia and Cathy left. It seemed that maybe it was time to think again.

‘I think I’m going to go back to London.’

Jerry looked up from his guitar.

‘Yeah, why?’

‘The next term at college starts in about a fortnight, and there’ll be a hundred and-twenty

quid grant cheque waiting for me; also I'd like to check out that the flat's okay.'

'Do you want to go back to college?'

'Dunno, it was really getting to be a drag. I could-do with that bread, though.'

'It'd be handy.'

'Right.'

Jerry went back to picking his guitar, but after about a minute he stopped.

'If I came back to London with you, could I stay at your place?'

'Of course, maybe we could get into making some music.'

'That's what I was thinking. You can't find any~ musicians to play with out here, and anyway it'll start turning cold in about a month. Do you think we could maybe put a band together?'

'It's possible. It'd be easy to start off doing a kind of folk blues thing and see where it got us.'

'I'd rather play rock and roll.'

I nodded towards Jerry's pile of radio sets.

'You're going to need more than that to go on stage with. Starting a band can cost a bundle for gear and that.'

Despite my pessimism, Jerry's enthusiasm began to gather momentum. -

'There must be ways round that.'

'Sure, but it'll probably take time.'

There was no stopping Jerry, however, once he had started. 'Okay then, maybe we should work out something we can do with two guitars, while we look round for ways to get a band going.'

I nodded.

'That sounds like the best idea. Let's load our stuff into the jeep and split first thing in the morning.'

I looked round.

'What about this place?'

Jerry shrugged.

'I just leave it, nobody's going to come all the way out here to break in.'

'What about the dogs?'

'Oh, that's okay. There's a guy with a farm nearby who'll look after them. We dump them off on him, and then split for the city. Okay?'

I nodded. Once again I was being carried along by Jerry's sudden impulses.

Just a lad of eighteen summers, And there's no one can deny...

The gig on Saturday nights in the Irish pub was the mainstay of our income for that first autumn Jerry and I spent together in London.

When we had arrived from Cornwall in the laden jeep, the landlord hadn't been too happy about Jerry moving in, but when we offered him an extra pound a week he seemed a good deal more pleased.

Apart from picking up my grant and signing in now and again, I virtually stopped going to college. Jerry and I spent all day playing our guitars, working out what we could do together. The rest of the time we went to the pub, tried to find chicks and generally lay about. We got the odd bit of grass.

We tried a few of the folk clubs, but the things we were doing were altogether too funky for the purists, and we didn't get booked back again very often. Our major success was in the Irish pub where we were hired to play from eight to eleven for five pounds and all the Guinness the customers would buy us.

We found that although the paddies would tolerate blues and the odd Dylan song, our drink quota rose quite significantly when we learned *Kevin Barry* and a few other Irish rebel songs. They liked us to play a good deal of rock and roll, and seemed better pleased by volume than technique. We were also expected to act as a backing group for the occasional drunk who wanted to sing *Living Doll* or *That's When Your Heartaches Begin.*

As the weeks went by we found that a few people were beginning to drop into the pub to listen to us, students, beats, the kind of embryonic hippies you could find all over West London, and gradually we began to form our own little circle of freaks who were prepared to listen to what we wanted to play We found ourselves cutting out a lot of the crowd pleasers we had been playing for the Irishmen, and getting into more and more blues, past the obvious standards like Broonzy and Muddy Waters, and digging out songs like Robert Johnson's *Preachin' Blues,* Blind Willie Johnson's *You're Gonna Need Somebody on Your Bond,* and songs by guys like Son House, Rev. Gary Davis and Tommy McClennan. We explored the possibility of Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams and Jimmy Rogers, and even unearthed an absurd country song called *Married by the Bible, Divorced by the Law.*

We were having a drink before starting playing one Saturday, it must have been some time in November because I remember it being cold and damp as we walked there. A guy I'd noticed watching us a couple of times came into the pub. He was a tall pale cat with the final trace of acne and an over long Elvis Presley haircut. He wore the collar of his brown cord jacket turned up against the cold.

He ordered a pint, and then hesitantly came over to where we were sitting.

'Hi.'

He had more than a trace of an accent.

'Are you playing tonight then?'

A Welsh accent. Jerry looked up and nodded.

'Yeah.'

'Great.'

He sat down. It was obvious he wanted something, but Jerry and I didn't give him any help. Eventually he came out with
it.

'Would you mind if I played with you on a couple of songs?'

He didn't seem to have any kind of instrument with him, I wondered if he played the harmonica.

'You mean tonight?'

Jerry was obviously wondering the same thing.

'If that's okay.'

'I guess so, what do you play?'

'Bass.'

'Bass?'

'Yeah, I live round the corner, I'll shoot round and get it.'

Jerry frowned.

'I don't know if we could make enough noise to compete with an amplifier.'

The guy grinned and shook his head.

'It's not a bass guitar. it's a double bass.' Jerry's eyes widened.

'No shit. a proper standup bass?'

'Yeah.'

'Well, run and get it, man.'

Denny, for that's what his name turned out to be, played with us for the whole evening. It was one of the best nights we had ever bad in that pub. Denny's slapping bass gave us the chance to extend ourselves into all kinds of new stuff. We played all the early Elvis stuff,

That's Alright, Money Honey, Good Rockin' Tonight, Arthur Crudup's *Mean ol' Frisco,* and Jerry even tried singing a dubious version of *I Walk the Line.* Even the paddies seemed to enjoy the change in the music, and we got our quota of Guinness without having to play any Irish songs at all.

Jerry asked Denny to come back the following week, and sure enough, just before eight he showed up, lugging his battered bass. He showed up again the week after, and when we'd finished he took Jerry and me back to his minute attic bed-sitter, and we spent the whole night rapping down how maybe we could extend what we were doing. Although nobody had actually put it into words, it was obvious that we had taken another step towards becoming a group.

Jerry's enthusiasm was at go.

'Hey listen, why don't I bring an amplifier next week? We could get into some solos then, we could do all kinds of things.'

Denny was nodding like his head was in danger of falling off.

'Yeah, you could do sort of Scotty Moore things on *That's Alright* and *Good Rockin' Tonight.'*

'Right.'

I was beginning to wonder how my acoustic guitar was going to be heard, but Jerry and Denny were going so fast that 1 didn't have time to say anything.

'You know what, what we could really do with is a piano player.'

Denny bounced up in his seat.

'Listen man, we could have one, I've got this mate called plays piano. We could almost certainly get him along.'

Really?'

'Yeah.'

I could see my guitar disappearing altogether and it seemed it was about time to point out the fact.

'I ain't going to be heard at all.'

'That's true.'

'So what are you going to do about it?'

There was a long silence. They obviously hadn't considered me in their plans. Jerry looked worried.

'It's a problem.'

'You could say that.'

He looked sideways at me.

'Do you really want to play the guitar'?' 'What else could I do?'

Jerry beamed as though inspiration had struck him.

'You could sing.'

'Just sing?'

'Yeah, maybe play harmonica as well.' I wasn't too sure.

'It makes me a bit of a spare part, doesn't it?'

'No man, you could really concentrate on singing.' 'You reckon?'

Jerry became super diplomatic.

'Sure, I don't see why not.' Denny joined in.

'It's really a knockout idea.'

I was still doubtful, but there didn't seem to be any alternative.

'Okay, we could give it a try.'

So our five pounds started to be split four ways, although at first I was very unsure of

myself standing up singing, without even a guitar to protect me. Alan, another taffy, was an exceeding good boogie pianist who had grown up on Ray Charles, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, and graduated to Otis Spann and Pinetop Smith. The only thing I had difficulty with was his passion for Mose Allison, which to my mind was a good deal too smooth for what we were doing, but since it only happened on two songs. *Young Man Blues* and *Parchman Farm,* it didn't worry me too much.

We fell into a routine that involved playing on Saturday nights and starving the rest of the time. The only high point was Christmas, when we played at a college dance for fifteen quid, and the landlord gave us twenty for playing four days straight over the holiday. For the rest of the time we lived off Jerry's fifteen pounds and waited for my January grant cheque to show up.

In January, things began to look up. I went into college and picked up my cheque, and then the four of us went out and got falling-down drunk. By pointing out the number of people we were pulling into the pub on Saturdays, we managed to persuade the landlord to raise our money to eight pounds. The major boost to our morale was that we got two gigs. The first was playing for some rich bird's party, which would probably have proved tedious if we hadn't got drunk on her champagne. The second was at a small blues club where we played second on the bill to Alexis Korner. The three hundred people crowded into the tiny cellar was the biggest audience we had ever played to and it made us feel that we were really on our way. For the first time, we started thinking seriously about ourselves as a band.

The first part of this new seriousness was the decision that we ought to have a name.

At the end of a wet Saturday night in February we took a bottle back to Denny's and spent the night looking for an acceptable name with which we could find fame and fortune.

'The Ace Blues Band.'

'No.'

'The Acme Blues Band.'

'Jesus.'

'Jackson's Confederate Marching Band?'

'Too long.'

'The Foundation.'

'No way.'

'The Delta Four.'

'No way.'

'The Wimps.'

'The Simpletons.'

'No.'

'The Down the Line Blues Band.'

'Fuck off.'

'So you got an idea then?'

'No, but one might come.'

'It ain't come yet.'

'We want a good name, it's worth taking a bit of trouble over.'

Jerry was lying on the bed very quiet, then suddenly he sat up.

'Uncle Dooley's Blues Band.'

'Uncle Dooley's Blues Band?'

'You've got to be joking.'

'No seriously, it's a good name.'

'I dunno.'

'It's the best yet.'

'It could be all right.'

‘Yeah, maybe it could grow on one.’
We became Uncle Dooley’s Blues Band.

There was this advert in the *Melody Maker*. It read: ‘The Morris Diamond Agency seeking bands for management and promotion.’
There was a phone number.
Later the same day I showed the ad to Jerry. At first he seemed dubious.
‘We’ll probably get burned.’
‘But we need someone to get us gigs.’
‘Sure, but the Morris Diamond Agency sounds dead iffy.’
‘We can’t lose nothing by talking to him.’
After a lot more wrangling we compromised by calling Denny. He seemed to think that anything that could get us gigs was worth a try, and I persuaded Jerry to phone the number.
He arranged that we would go and see Morris Diamond the next day.

Morrie Diamond had a pokey little office on the fifth floor of a Victorian office block at the north end of Shaftesbury Avenue. He was a small man with greasy slicked back hair that receded at the temples to give him the appearance of a balding teddy boy.
His office was frankly seedy. Two tiny rooms, one for him and one for his receptionist, secretary, a slightly overweight Diana Dors blonde who looked like she doubled as his bit-on-the-side. The walls were covered with old record company promo posters for people like Shirley Bassey and Petula Clark, and photos of some of the loser groups he had handled at one time or another.
It was no great start in the glittering world of show business, and I wanted to get out of the place right away, but Jerry seemed to do an abrupt about face from his previous reluctance and was listening to Diamond with apparent interest as he explained his situation.
‘Now I want you boys to understand that I make a perfectly good living buying and selling...’
‘Buying and selling what?’
‘Acts, my son, acts. You get a contract off the act’s agent at one price and sell it to a promoter at another.’
‘Oh.’
‘Anyway, like I’m saying, I make a good living, but 1 like to have a couple of artistes to promote because it’s a challenge. What’s life without some sort of challenge? And there’s always the chance of your artiste hitting it big.’
Jerry nodded.
‘You never can tell.’
‘Right, my boy, that’s what I always say, you never can tell. But enough about me, what makes you boys think you’re the ones I might want!’
Jerry looked evenly at him.
‘We’re good.’
‘Good, schmood. They’re all good these days. What do you do that’s original?’
‘We don’t have a drummer.’
‘So what do you have?’
‘Piano, guitar, standup bass and Lou here sings.’
‘And what do you do with this lineup?’
‘I dunno how you’d describe it. I suppose it’s halfway between rock and folk.’
‘Folk-rock!’
His little eyes lit up.

'Folk-rock's the coming thing. Why, only the other day Al Grossman, you know Albert Grossman, he manages that Bob Dylan, he said, "Morrie". he said, "folk-rock's the coming thing".'

We looked at him with unconcealed disbelief, but he didn't seem to notice.

'I'd like to come and see you boys, and if I like your act, I'll take you on. Do you play anywhere?'

'Yeah, we play in this pub on Saturday nights.'

'Great, great. Just give me the name of the pub, and I'll come down to have a look at you Saturday, okay?'

'Okay.'

Morrie Diamond came down to see us and began raving about our wonderful new sound, and Jerry came straight to the point, wanting to know what he could do about getting us work. Morrie said he'd start working on it, and we arranged to meet him in his office on the following Monday.

When Monday rolled around, we all trooped along to Shaftesbury Avenue, and found Morrie waiting for us with a five page contract which he seemed anxious for us to sign. Again it was Jerry who acted as spokesman.

'I don't think we can sign this on the spot.'

Morrie didn't seem too troubled.

'Of course not, my boy, take your time. Read it, and if there's anything you don't like, bring it back and we'll talk about it.'

Jerry nodded, looking thoughtful.

'What about gigs?'

Morrie spread his hands.

'I can't really do much for you until you've signed with my organization, can I?'

Jerry stared round Morrie's 'organization'.

'That creates a problem. I mean, I don't want us to appear awkward, but...'

Morrie beamed, and leaned back in his swivel chair.

'But you want to know if I can get you work before you'll sign?'

'In a word — yes.'

Morrie's smile became one of knowing bonhomie.

'You boys weren't born yesterday, were you? You want some kind of indication that I can do my part?'

'You've seen us do ours.'

'True, true. So I'll tell you what I'll do. You take the contract home with you and read it, and in the meantime I'll try and put you into a few places to see how you make out. Is that all right?'

We all nodded.

'Sounds all right to us.'

We tried to stall Morrie about signing the contract for as long as possible, we took bits out, put bits in, talked about it, and argued.

He did, however, come across with a couple of dates. We played something called the Commonwealth Visitors' Club, which left us and the predominantly Pakistani audience both wondering what we had been doing there. The other gig was at one of the North London blues clubs and, for a support group, we went down quite well.

After about a month we ran out of ways to keep Morrie hanging about any longer and we signed the contract. To be fair, Morrie did start to get the work in, and another month found us quitting the pub and doing two or three gigs each week, but although we revelled in the thought of being a genuine working band, we found our troubles were just starting.

The first was money. We weren't getting more than twenty-five pounds for any gig, and we found we were spending a small fortune on hiring trucks and drivers to take us to gigs. The luxury of a road manager was far beyond our reach.

The second problem was equipment. Although our contracts all had 'Piano to be provided' clearly written in, we found that in nearly half the places we were booked into, there was no sign of one when we showed up, and we took to taking a spare twelve string guitar with us so Alan had at least something to play on. We also badly needed a PA and microphones as it was always an embarrassment having to use the ones belonging to the main group.

We also began to have trouble with Alan, who, apart from being pissed off at being deprived of a piano half the time, had a problem. His daytime job as a draughtsman, which he was not inclined to give up while the band could only expected to take home seven or eight pounds each week, was suffering from the amount of sleep he missed while on the road with us.

Alan's troubles found a short term remedy in amphetamines. Purple hearts were all the rage in London at this time, and the Who's Tuesday night shows at the Marquee had become a regular speed freaks' convention.

One by one we all fell into the habit of swallowing a few pills about an hour before we went on stage, and though it made us rock along merrily, it did nothing for our frustrations over lack of gear, and even introduced a new problem of
doubts as to whether our funky, downhome blues was really the kind of music we wanted to play.

Jerry and I started going out to see bands like the Who and the Yardbirds, and wondered why the fuck we weren't playing that kind of music. Then towards the end of the summer, Alan, after looking sicker and sicker, finally announced that he was going to quit. It seemed that maybe it was time for some changes.

The three of us took our problem to Morrie, who was his usual beaming self.

'I always thought you boys should go electric. I never had much confidence in this folk nonsense.'

Nobody asked him if he had told Albert Grossman that. He looked round at us. -

'You're going to need a lot of equipment, have you thought about that?'

'Yes, we thought about it.'

'And?'

'We're broke.'

'Can't raise any at all.'

'We were hoping maybe we could get a loan off you.'

Morrie's face took on an expression of theatrical grief.

'I'd like to help you, but all my capital's tied up.'

Jerry's mouth curved in a hint of a sneer.

'I thought it might be.'

Morrie caught it, and his voice became a hard done by Jewish whine.

'Really boys, you know I'd help you if I could, but I just can't.'

A thought struck me.

'What about HP?'

Morrie brightened.

'Maybe we could do something there. I've got this brother-in-law with a music shop in Hackney. We might be able to fix up something there.'

'I doubt if we could raise any deposits.'

Morrie winked.

‘Don’t worry about that, I think we can find a way round it. Any other problems?’
‘We’re going to need a drummer.’

We got a load of second-hand fifty-watt gear from Morrie’s brother-in-law, and I traded my guitar in exchange for a Vox bass for Denny.

We also found Connie through an ad in the *Melody Maker.*

Connie Raymond came from a town a few miles down the coast from where I had grown up. He had played in four or five of those bands who, but for the grace of God, might have been the Rolling Stones, and could knock out a Bo Diddley rhythm in his sleep.

If you met him in the street you wouldn’t have taken him for a drummer. He was pale and fragile looking, with what later became called a Hendrix haircut, but at the time he liked to think he looked like Bob Dylan.

He might have looked frail in normal life, but once seated behind a drum kit he put out incredible natural energy, boosted by the fact that he was an outrageous pill head. He also had a mate who owned a seventeen-hundredweight truck.

We took to him immediately.

The pub Morrie found for us to rehearse in cost a pound an hour, and that limited the amount of work we could put in on our new electric act, and we had to rely heavily on R & B standards that we all knew well. Don Covay’s *Mercy, Who Do You Love, Walking the Dog,* and a half hour long version of *Smokestack Lightning,* plus a couple of Dylan influenced songs that Jerry and I had written for the old lineup and hastily adapted for the electric band.
We made one other change when Connie joined the band. We dropped the blues band tag and just called ourselves Uncle.
It was six weeks, almost to the day, after Alan split that we went out on our first gig with the new electric band.

It seems to be time to cool things out a bit. The ushers and rent-nave got the kids as nearly back into their seats as they can without stopping the show, and I'm round beside the drums taking a quick hit from a can of beer. It's amazing how you can feel the beer go straight through your system, being turned into sweat within seconds.

Chas darts from behind the stack of speakers.

'Here, you better have these.'

He drops some white pills into my hand. I swallow them, and find they are salt tablets. I walk to the front. Jerry is talking to the audience.

'We're gonna ease off, we're gonna play something slow for you now.'

I join in.

'That's right, we're gonna take it real easy, don't want you I getting over excited. We don't want anyone to die.'

Jerry starts tentatively into the introduction, down from the seventh. It's our one blues. I keep on talking.

'Learned this from a Chicago harmonica player called Shaky Jake.'

Back up to the seventh and the others come in, it's slow and easy.

Never know how much I love you,
Never know how much I care,
Know I love you pretty baby.
Life I cannot bear
My love for you.

Jerry stabs in with a tight mean riff.

My love will never die.
If you don't love me baby

Stop. Jerry and I in harmony.

Please tell me the reason why.

Jerry and Mac soar with guitars for three bars and then fall way sharply. The lighting men throw a red spot at me and lean towards the audience, arms spread in front of me, the mike lead stretched across, stretched between the fingers of each hand. The song takes an evil turn.

I can feel the pain a-burnin'

Jerry's guitar moans.

Deep down in my soul.

Mac answers, and the whole thing is starting to build ~ again, only this time it is different. It may be slow,
but it is not relaxed. The audience are held down by the tension.

Think about your lovin'
Makes my heart go cold.

Connie turns on the pressure, the footlights dim.

My love for you

The stage is very dark.

Oh god, my love will never die.

Those old Otis Redding mannerisms are coming out.

If you don't love me baby

Stop.

Please tell me the reason why.

There is a long ascending bottleneck note from Mac and white spot hits him. He's hunched

over his guitar, his face hidden by his hair. The reds in the footlights gradually con up as he starts his mournful wailing solo. There are little flashes of light from his guitar and the stainless steel bottleneck round his finger.

The lights coming up are kind of like a new dawn, red an evil, and Mac's solo draws its images from the dark side of the blues. The music of hot delta days when African hell seemed very near. Listen to Robert Johnson or Wolf if you don't know what I mean.

When you're a small-time band playing the local rock club in a place like Carlisle, your only hope is to find some chicks who'll put the band up for the night. You don't make enough on the gig to pay any hotel bills, so it's a case of either get laid or do the three hundred mile drive back to London straight after the gig. And even with some pills to see you through, it's no joke spending ten or eleven hours on a hypnotic motorway, watching the white lines, avoiding the hallucinations that gather in the hedgerows, and forcing conversation with the driver to stop him falling asleep at the wheel.

From the moment we climbed on the stage to do the first of pour two forty-five minute sets I could see Jerry was scanning the pack of little mod girls in the front of the stage, checking our prospects.

The rock and roll band rumour mill said Carlisle was an easy town to score in. So little happened there that a night with a rock musician was a welcome relief to the monotony of life as a waitress or factory girl. The only thing was to choose ıcarefully and make sure the one you pulled didn't live with her parents, or it would be a half hour of fumbling in the back of the truck, and then out on the road.

I spotted a little blonde in a white dress, bouncing about in the front row. She looked slightly older than the average bopper, and I decided to go to work on her. I began to point my singing straight at her. Slim Harpo's *King Bee* was built for doing a number on chicks in the audience.

I'm a king bee, baby, Buzzing round your hive

With a campy gesture I flicked my hair out of my eyes, throwing my head back and letting my eyelids
droop. I peered down straight at her.

I got so much honey baby

Ah

I moved my hips lazily.

Let me come inside.

While Jerry buzzed moodily between the verses I swung away, and moved down the small stage. I didn't want to o~ kill the lady too early.

I'm a king bee,

Want you to be my queen.

I grinned, and she grinned back. It seemed I was home free.

We stumbled back into the tiny dressing room, sweating Jerry and Denny wiped off their guitars and stuck them their cases.

'Lot of birds out there.'

'I'll say.'

'There's a lot of people.'

'I don't think there's anywhere else to go.' 'That's why they pay so rotten.'

'How much are we getting, then?'

'Thirty.'

'Thirty, for coming all this fucking way?' I shrugged.

'What can you do? Let's go out and get a drink. Check local maidens.'

We shouldered our way through the crowd to the I Blondie was already there with three of her mates. We push through to them, past the horde of local manhood queuing for their pints. With their greaser haircuts and Burton suits you could see why the women went after rock musicians.

The four girls seemed to know what they were about. There was no nudging and giggling as we walked up to them. Blondie looked up and grinned.

'Hello.'

'Hi.'

'Going to buy us a drink then?'

'I suppose so, but keep it cheap, we don't have much mc until we get paid.'

'Can you manage a gin and tonic?'

'It depends what the others want.'

One of her mates grinned.

'It's all right, we'll make do with halves.'

I shoved myself to the front of the crowd waiting to served.

'Can I have some drinks for the band?'

The barmaid came over.

'You'll have to pay for them.'

'Yeah, I know, I just want to get served before we have to play again.'

I brought the drinks back to where Connie, Denny, Jerry the girls were standing. We went through introductions, and
it turned out that blondie's name was Angie.

The crowd of rednecks began to become oppressive and Connie kept looking at his watch to see if it was time to go on again.

It seemed to be right to cut the girls out from the herd.

'Listen, why don't we get some more drinks and take them to the dressing room?'

I turned to Angie.

'You and your mates can watch the second set from the side the stage then.'

She nodded and, leaving Denny and one of the girls to get me more drinks, we headed back toward the stage.

I started to check out our situation.

'Do you all live together?'

Angie shook her head.

' No. Me and Joan do.'

She nodded towards the tall thin girl with long dyed black hair that Jerry had his arm round.

'The others usually stay at my place at weekends so they can get away from their folks.'

I nodded, it seemed we had really scored.

'What do you all do?'

'Work in the sodding biscuit factory. Don't talk about it.'

We all crowded into the minute dressing room and made the kind of rock band smart remarks that owe a lot to the Marx Brothers, until the promoter told us it was time to go on again.

After the second set, the girls were waiting for us in the dressing room. I dried myself off, changed my shirt and
went to look for Mo, the driver, who was dismantling the gear. A little mousey girl in a red mini dress was sitting at the side of the stage watching him as he packed away the drums.

'It looks as though we've scored ourselves somewhere to kip for the night.'

Mo looked up from folding away the snare stand. 'Yeah?'

He nodded towards the girl in the red dress.

‘I ain’t done badly myself.’

‘Has she got a place?’

‘Yeah, her mum and dad are away for the weekend.’ ‘So you’re going round there?’

Mo grinned.

‘Too right.’

‘Okay then, if you can drop us off at this place we’re staying, and then pick us up in the morning.

‘What time do you want to get away in the morning?’

‘Dunno, whenever you’re ready.’

‘Okay, I won’t make it early.’

We helped Mo pack the gear into the truck, and then piled in on top of it ourselves. Ten people in a seventeen-hundred weight truck was almost impossible, but somehow we manage it, and about ten minutes later Mo disgorged us outside Angie’s and Joan’s house.

It was one of those mean Northern streets of two story tenements, one down and two up with the front door opening straight from the pavement to the living room, and the toilet the back yard.

Angie shushed us as we stood blinking at the depressing dead-eyed windows of the houses opposite, unlocked the dc and we trooped inside.

‘Want some coffee?’

We all nodded, and started distributing ourselves round I small living room as Angie put the kettle on. Joan seemed feel obliged to make conversation.

'You all from London?’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘It must be good living in London.’

She looked sort of wistful. Jerry looked at her.

‘Don’t you like it here?’

‘No, it’s dreadful. There’s nothing to do at all.’

‘Why don’t you move out?’

‘Dunno, I’d really like to, but...’

She tailed off. It was always the same with these provincial birds. Nothing to hold them in their 1ittle town, but afraid leave it. They needed the rock band to come round on Sa day to prove that there was something beyond the grey street and the biscuit factory. They had to escape, but only had the confidence to do it by proxy. I began to get depressed and got up to look through their records.

I stayed depressed until Angie took me away from the others. and up to one of the small bedrooms. Jerry and Joan were in the other, while Denny, Connie and their two chicks had to make do with the living room floor.

Angie lit the gas fire and a couple of candles. Then she switched the light off and turned to face me. I put my hands on her hips, and pulled her towards me. Her arms went round my waist and she pressed against me eagerly, fingers working n my back. I bent my head forward and kissed her. Her mouth opened wide and her tongue darted in and out of my mouth. It almost seemed that she was trying too hard. I put my mouth over her ear and ran my tongue around it. Her breathing became faster and she rubbed her pelvis hard against me. I stepped back and put my hand on her breast.

‘Why don’t you take your clothes off?’

She smiled.

‘Wouldn’t you like to undress me?’

I grinned back.

‘I’d rather watch you do it yourself.’

She smiled and struck a pose that was straight out of a tit mag.

'Fancy a striptease, do you?'

I sat on the bed and started to unbutton my shirt. 'Yeah, why not?'

She closed her eyes, let her head fall back and slowly ran her tongue around her lips. It seemed to be a product of all the movies she had seen.

One by one she undid the buttons down the front of her dress, then ran a hand across her breast and up to slip it off her shoulder. She turned her body sideways and slipped her arms out of the dress altogether, and with a stripper's grind she eased it down her body and let it fall round her ankles. She stepped out of the dress, kicked it away and reached behind her to unhook her bra.

Her breasts were on the small side, but they were firm as she cupped them with her hands, after dropping her bra on the floor.

She turned her back on me and with a bend of her knees she slid out of her panties, and while she stood posing in her black suspender belt, silver stockings and white shoes, letting her nice white bottom turn me on. I stood up and put my a round her and cupped her breast with one hand while I slid other between her legs. I let the tip of my thumb slip inside her, and she leaned back against me and wriggled, trying push it higher.

Without removing my hand, I turned her round and walk her back to the bed letting her thighs rub against my hand. She moaned softly and sank face forward on the bed. I caressed her buttocks, and then without warning slapped them with the flat of my hand.

'Bastard.'

She rolled over with a jerk and grabbed my balls. I fell to ward on top of her and she raked my back with the nails of h other hand. I bit her shoulder, and we rolled on the bed laughing, then I slid off the bed. Kneeling on the floor I put mouth between her legs.

'Oh Lou, oh!'

Her body stiffened and she writhed lazily.

'Oh that's nice.'

After a while I climbed on the bed beside her. She nuzzled my ear.

'A boy never did that to me before. It was so nice.'

I was surprised, surely that wasn't true. I said nothing. One thing was becoming obvious, this young woman was the kind who liked to talk.

She gently stroked my penis, and eased my jeans off. kicked them on to the floor and began to roll on top of her, but she put a hand on my chest.

'Can I fuck you?'

I missed the point at first and mumbled something about that being the general idea. She kissed me and grinned.

'Lay back then.'

Understanding dawned, and I did as I was told. She threw her leg over my hips and knelt above me on all fours, then lowered herself, easing me into her with her hands. Then s arched her back and pushed her weight down into me, wriggling her hips from side to side. I pushed up against her.

'Oh Lou.'

I cupped both her breasts with my hands and pulled gently on the nipples.

'Mmm'

She made little bucking motions and I put my hands under to help her.

'Oh that's nice.'

Her movements became more violent and I forced myself upwards trying to match time with her.

'Lou oh Lou!'

I gave her marks for consistently getting my name right.
'Oh baby, oh please.'
'Harder
'Please
'Lou
'Lou!
'Oh Lou!
'Oh, oh, oh
'Lou!
'Lou
'Oh!
'Oh!!
'OH!!!'

She sank forward on top of me, and I ran a hand over the Ion on her leg. It reminded her that she was still wearing stockings. and she jumped up and took them off. Then she turned back the blankets and we got inside the bed. She snuggled up to me, and we lay there for a long time. I drifted into a half sleep, until a hand on my prick and a nice in my ear brought me back to reality.

'Lou?'

'Hunh?'

'Lou, can we do it again? Please?'

I kissed her and took her in my arms. She talked her way through it again, and after the final explosive gasps we again curled up together. She propped herself up on one elbow and pared at me. Her eyes reflected the candlelight.

'When you're famous, I'll be able to tell everyone about how had you.'

It must have been about eleven when Jerry threw the door open.

'You'd better think about getting up if we're going to get back to London before midnight.' I groaned and rolled over.

'Fuck off.'

Angie opened her eyes.

'What's going on?'

Jerry sat down on the bed.

'It's time for your lovin' man to drag his arse out of bed.

'Want a fag?'

I sat up in bed and took a cigarette. Jerry gave me a light and I started coughing.

'Has Mo shown up yet?'

'Yeah, he's gone off to score some groceries.'

I rolled over and stroked Angie's stomach.

'Going to make us some breakfast?'

She leaned up against me and whispered.

Can we have a fuck first?'

She ran her hand up my leg.

'Please.'

We felt like aliens when we finally emerged into the sunlight. We seemed to have no business in these hard street among the kids who ran around shouting and playing football, the women who gossiped on their doorsteps and the men setting off for the pub in their Sunday suits.

As we milled about in the street, waiting to get in the truck and each trying to manoeuvre

his way into the front seat, the women on the neighbouring doorsteps eyed us suspicious You could feel the heavy put-down, and words like ‘poof’ and ‘whore’ seemed to be engraved on the air.

As I was getting in the truck Angie hurried out of I house.

‘Lou.’

‘What, babe?’

‘Will you come and see me next time you play in Carlisle I kissed her on the cheek.

‘Of course I will. Take care of yourself.’

‘And you.’

As the truck pulled away, I flashed on her competing I next week’s band, and I remembered the collection of lit things from various bands, maracas, drumsticks, a tambourine, and how one of my harmonicas had been added to it.

Soon we were out in the mountains, away from the little town and its little lives. It seemed almost as though our reality was here on the road.

Uncle seemed to be a good deal more successful than the blues band, and by Christmas we were averaging about three pigs a week and getting paid at least fifty for them. We were getting quite tight and together, except for times when Denny would start to bitch about how he really wanted to play jazz, but these usually didn’t last too long.

But it wasn’t without its attendant problems, and the major one was money.

On paper, we should have been doing quite well with an average group income of something like a hundred and fifty a week, but it was amazing how it seemed to dwindle to the point where we never seemed to be able to take home much more than about fifteen to twenty pounds each.

Usually, when we got a contract for a gig it read ‘Cash to be paid on the night’, but now and then Morrie would send us one where the payment clause was changed to ‘Cheque to be sent to agency within three days’, so Morrie could be certain he could get his twenty per cent commission, and his brother-in-law would get his HP payments.

This system was fine while we owed Morrie money, but as the money began to go up and the gigs became more frequent, it became a more and more regular occurrence to find at the end a gig that a cheque was being sent to Morrie, and the situation was being reversed so that, most of the time, he owed us money.

We found ourselves constantly having to troop down to Shaftsbury Avenue to pick up some bread, and, as often as not, Morrie would come up with some tale of how he didn’t have any cheques or that the banks were shut, and it could take up to three trips to his office before we got our wages, the petrol money or the cash to pay Mo.

Relationships with Morrie had never been that good, and in the January lull, when cash got short, they really started to deteriorate. There was primarily the money problem, but a secondary consideration was that we had begun to get a serious ph to record something, and it was becoming obvious that he didn’t have the proper contacts, despite all his bluff, to get us a record deal, or to promote a disc once it had been released.

The music business was changing fast. The pirates had broken the BBC’s radio monopoly and a new breed of your flash, long-haired hustlers were quickly easing Morrie’s old Tin Pan Alley chums out of the scene.

It was an unsatisfactory situation, but being dissatisfied and actually doing something about it were two entirely different things. The fact that we were spending most of our time either working or sleeping made it very difficult to start serious looking for another agent and manager, and, although it was constant topic of conversation as we rode home in the truck coming down off amphetamines, nothing really got done about it.

Another problem was that Jerry and I were getting very tired of both sleeping in the same room. The romance of living the Chinaman's house, down among the winos, had long sin faded, and the hangup of listening to each other balling was getting pretty intense.

We didn't particularly want to split up and each live on our own, but the idea of a bit of privacy was becoming very attractive. The ideal solution seemed to be to find a flat with at least two bedrooms, but again we suffered from a lack of time to house hunting.

It was during that first winter on the road that Jerry and I managed to acquire a criminal record.

We were playing second on the bill at a town hall dance High Wycombe. It was unfortunate that High Wycombe town hail is right next door to the police station, otherwise we probably wouldn't have been busted.

It had been a good gig, we had dropped a lot of pills a roared through our act, getting the seven hundred mods who were jammed into the hail nicely warmed up for the black soul show that was the main attraction.

Jerry, Connie and I had managed to put together enough change to buy ourselves a bottle of Johnnie Walker red, a after we had finished our act and changed we still had to w to get our money, and move the equipment off the stage. Rather than sit in the dressing room we had stumbled out into the main hail where the kids were rocking out to *Midnight Hour*.

Speeding the way we were, the audience became altogether claustrophobic and we decided to go outside and get some air. It was a cold night, but we had our bottle to keep us warm The air hit us as we walked down the town hail steps and I felt a bit dizzy, and by the look of them Connie and Jerry were in much the same condition.

Undaunted, however, we lurched off down the main street passing our bottle and giving out with loud joviality, which after about thirty yards, attracted the attention of two of High Wycombe's finest in a panda car. They pulled up beside us and one of them jumped out.

'Alright you three, you're nicked.'

We looked at each other. We were stunned.

'Why?'

'What for?'

The second cop came round the car.

'You're drunk, we've been watching you come up the road. Jerry looked outraged.

'Us, drunk! You've got to be kidding!'

The first cop put a hand on Jerry, who swung round and shook himself free.

'Take your fucking hands off me, I'm not drunk.' Connie and I joined in.

'That's right, we're not drunk, we just came out from the dance.'

'Listen man, we're the fucking band. We came out for some

The cops didn't want to know, and began to look ugly.

'The three of you are booked for obstruction.' Jerry looked like he was going to explode.

'We ain't obstructing nothing! Caution us and we'll move!' After that, it all became very confused. The cops grabbed Jerry and started to drag him into the car. I grabbed hold of him to stop them. I was grabbed, Connie grabbed me, then a in pulled up, six more cops came rushing over and we found ourselves lying in the darkness of the paddy wagon with a inch of burly policemen holding us down.

The cell was like a badly appointed public lavatory with its white tiles, dim light and toilet bowl in the corner. I could hear Jerry yelling and screaming to be let out further down the corridor, but, as the sergeant who had charged us with being drunk and disorderly and

obstructing an officer had told earlier, they were going to keep us in for the night.

I lay down on the rubber mattress and stared at the ceiling wondering what was happening with Mo and Denny, if they were waiting for us, or if they had collected the money from the gig and gone back to London.

I began to feel like a cigarette. The desk sergeant had let me keep them, but the bastard had taken away my matches. He had grinned and made some smart remark about how I might burn down the police station. I pressed the bell push beside the door. Nothing happened and I wondered if it was actual connected to anything. To be on the safe side I pressed it a few more times, and started wishing that I had something to read

I sat up on the bunk. I was bored with the ceiling, and tried staring at the wall instead. All those blues songs about doing ninety days for vagrancy started running through my mind but it seemed too hackneyed to start singing, and I began to count the bricks on the wall in front of me. I'd reached eight five when the peephole in the door slid open with a click.

'Well?'

I looked up at the section of face framed by the small rectangle. It was a young copper.

'Can I have some matches?'

'Sorry, you might set fire to the cell.'

It was as though they had a regulation issue joke book.

'Yeah, but listen, I'm gasping for a fag.'

'I can give you a light.'

He struck a match and held it through the peephole. I put my cigarette to the flame and inhaled.

'Thanks.'

The peephole slammed shut, and I lay back on the bunk stare cross-eyed at the end of my fag, trying to make it last long as possible. When it was finally gone I rolled over, and turning my face to the wall I tried to sleep.

In the morning I was woken by a sergeant in his shirtsleeves who wanted to know if I wanted breakfast. I nodded and maybe half an hour later a plate of beans on toast and a mug of tea turned up which made me wonder why I had bothered.

I was given another light for a cigarette, and after another wait I was let out into the corridor for a wash under a cold water tap, then I got locked up again for about another hour. Eventually I was taken out into the yard and loaded into a in with Jerry, Connie and three old winos. The policemen sitting with us cut short our little reunion, and the van started f on the short journey to the court.

'To all appearances you are filthy morons who have come our town with your unkempt hair and filthy clothes, with no regard to any standards of decent behaviour. I fine each of you n pounds, and you will each pay ten pounds costs.'

Jerry muttered under his breath.

'Sixty bleeding quid.'

A thought struck me.

'May we have time to pay?'

'Fourteen days.'

A policeman ushered us out of the dock.

After we had been through the process of signing ourselves out, we found Mo and Denny waiting for us on
the steps of the court. They had driven up from London to meet us, and were not looking too pleased.

'You three made right cunts of yourselves.'

‘Ahh! Leave it out, after a night in nick we don’t need it.’
‘Yeah but sixty quid. Jesus...’
Jerry swung round on him.
‘Shut the fuck up!’
Then Connie joined in.
‘We didn’t get nicked for the fun of it. It just fucking happened.’
Denny stormed off to the truck, and came on sullen all the way back to London.

I suppose that row outside the court was the first time the growing split between Denny and the rest of us showed. There had, of course, been his bitching about how he would like to play more jazz and similar things, but at the time we hadn’t really noticed how isolated he was getting.

When you are using a lot of amphetamines isolation can be serious problem, and those long truck rides back from gigs, then you are too tired to talk but the speed keeps your brain racing, can produce the most dangerous fantasies. As you sit there in silence, watching the cat’s eyes and the white lines flash past, the hedgerows become peopled with those strange crowds of hiding figures like something from an early *Mad* magazine.

In this state of mind, it is really easy for a chance remark or an ill-timed joke to start your paranoia racing down the road that leads to the belief that the others in the band are against you, hate you and want to get rid of you. It’s a state of mind where you begin to search for every tiny indication of the conspiracy against you, and once you start looking it is all too easy to find them.

I suppose if we had noticed the state Denny was getting into before he began to get really withdrawn, we might have managed to convince him that his isolation was a product of his own pilled-up mind, but to use a favourite phrase of Jerry’s, we were a rock and roll band not a therapy group, and Denny’s problems went unnoticed.

Another factor that must have contributed to his sense of being cut off from the rest of us was that soon after the incident of the night in jail, Jerry. Connie and I found a flat that we could all move into, and the three of us began to spend most of our time together. drinking, smoking dope and running after chicks as a threesome, while Denny became solitary to the point of only really seeing us on gigs, at rehearsals and when he needed money.

The new pad was a chance in a hundred. It had come to us via a dope dealer chum of ours who had decided to pack up his business and retire to Morocco. The flat was in one of the Edwardian mansion blocks in the no-man’s land where Bloomsbury merges with Covent Garden, unfurnished with three bedrooms and a living room, and even had a lift. The rent was sixteen pounds a week, which was not too much of a burden between the three of us, and the lease, which our buddy had given us as a gift, had another three and a half years to run.

It was ideal, we could really pose as flash little rockers with a West End pad. There was enough furniture left behind by the friendly neighbourhood dealer to make the place fashionably bare, and Jerry and I brought an old TV and stereo from the other house, so we virtually had everything we needed. The only drawback was that now we had a larger flat, Denny refused to store the gear at his place, and we had to have it stacked up in a corner of the living room.

There was a good place to eat just down the road. It was a Maltese joint that stayed open until about six in the morning, and was really handy for getting meals after we got back from gigs. Although it was filled with some of Malta’s prize hoods, they seemed to look on us as some kind of novelty, and we were treated with real friendliness that even extended to giving us credit when we were broke.

There was also a gang of pill-head strippers who hung out there. Mainly factory girls from

the North with blank faces and good bodies who had come down from places like Sheffield and Rochdale to find fame and fortune in the big city and had ended up stripping in the hundreds of Soho basement clubs.

Now and again one of us would chat up a stripper and take her back to the flat with us. It seemed a novelty for them to go with a hairy musician, and after listening for a polite interval to their rap about life and times in Rochdale or the scenes with some spic who beat them up, and they seemed to spend a lot of time getting beaten up by spics, we would lay them. The strange thing about these girls was, where the average groupie is into lots of blowjobs, kinks and funny positions, they bad no idea about finesse, and seemed to dig plain humping. Their kick was getting you to do it as many times as possible before they finally split to peel for the lunchtime punters.

These adventures invariably ended in a visit to the clap clinic in Charlotte Street, but we never seemed to learn. I suppose balling strippers still had that romantic, Robert Mitchum touch to it, and even now Jerry still reminisces about 'when we used to pull these strippers and catch the clap'.

It wasn't all cakes and ale at the new flat. There were quite a few frustrations building up inside the band, and the prime target was usually Morrie.

For a start we needed more gear. Jerry had his heart set on producing the kind of power that people like Townshend and Beck were putting out with their two-hundred-watt setups. I wanted a PA through which I could be heard, and Connie had his eye on a second bass drum. Denny, true to form, was quite happy with his Vox bass and *fifty-watt* amps.

Apart from the gear, our real hangup was that we weren't recording anything, and without that vital single we'd never push our money above the forty to fifty quid we were getting for gigs. We had a couple of what we thought were really good songs, although when I think of them now they seemed ludicrous combinations of Dylan and the Stones.

Every few days we would go down to Shaftesbury Avenue and bitch at Morrie about how nothing was coming together.

He'd shrug and give us some tale about how there were to many groups chasing too few contracts. Then he'd lecture u about how we should be grateful that we were working for reasonable money, and we'd go away and vent our frustration on Denny.

The net result was that we didn't get to record, we didn't get any new gear and the rows with Denny got more numerous and his sullen periods afterwards got longer and longer.

It began to look as though we were trapped in the life of definitely small name group, and the little flashes of success on nights when we were good only seemed to make it worse.

Both Jerry and I had the kind of egos that wouldn't allow s to drop into the role of humble jobbing musicians, but we were beginning to pretend we had when a way out appeared. came in the form of a person called Jimmy DiAngelo.

When Jimmy DiAngelo walked into the dressing room the North London club, we wondered what we had done. He was so much like a paisley shirted, long haired, new model~ the syndicate gunman that shaking in our shoes seemed the most polite thing to do.

'Are you boys Uncle?'

We nodded.

'That's us

'Good.'

He came over to the corner where Jerry and I were standing. He was actually much shorter than he first appeared, but way his dark eyes glittered as he glanced around, and his ha of standing unnaturally close to whoever he was talking gave him a very solid aura of being dangerous.

‘You two are the guitarist and singer?’

‘Yeah, that’s right.’

‘I’m Jimmy, Jimmy DiAngelo.’

The name was familiar. He had managed a band that about six months earlier had had a massive international hit, but then had fallen apart under the strain of being pop stars. Many people had put the success of the record down to Jimmy’s production and subsequent promotion. He shook hands with us. He used that trick of laying his thumb against his palm so the other person couldn’t crush his hand.

‘I’m Lou and this is Jerry.’

‘Do the two of you want a drink?’

Despite our nervousness, nothing would make us turn down a free drink. As we shouldered our way through the crowd to the bar, I wondered what Jimmy DiAngelo wanted with us. After he’d bought us both a double Scotch it didn’t take him long to come to the point.

‘Your band has possibilities.’

Jerry beamed.

‘You like it?’

‘I didn’t say I liked it, I said it had possibilities. It needs a whole lot of work before it’ll be worth anything.’

Jerry looked resentful.

‘What do you mean, work?’ Jimmy shrugged.

‘You’re playing all right, but there’s nothing behind you except the drummer. There’s no power coming out
of the band.’ Jerry looked defensive.

‘What do you expect with the gear we’ve got?’

‘It’s not just the gear, don’t fool yourself. The bass player’s an elbow, he’s just there for the ride, he’s coasting when he ought to be driving the group along.’

‘You reckon?’

‘If you got out in the audience and listened to yourselves it’d be obvious. You need to lose that bass player and get one with some balls, and you ought to think about another guitarist.’

Before Jerry could protest, he started on me.

‘Your singing could do with a lot of boosting too. A good PA would help there, but some more singing, harmonies, would make a whole lot of difference.’

His energy was so overwhelming that it took some time before I started to wonder why he was giving us all the free advice. Did he want to manage us or something? If that was the case, it was incredible.

‘Why are you telling us all this’?’

‘Like I said, the band has possibilities.’

‘And are you interested in doing something with us?’ He shook his head.

‘No.’

My hopes sank abruptly. ‘But I might be.’ They bobbed up again.

‘If you come and see me when you’ve got rid of that bass player, we could have something to talk about. Is anyone managing you now?’

‘Morrie Diamond.’

‘Christ, I suppose you got your gear off his brother-in-law?’

‘Sure, Morrie arranged the deal. How did you know?’

‘Never mind, it always happens.’

He looked at his watch.

‘Listen, it’s time I was somewhere else. Remember, get she of that bass player, don’t even worry about replacing him, am when you’ve done that, come and see me. Got it?’

‘I think so.’

‘Good, catch you later.’

Jimmy DiAngelo’s white suit disappeared into the crowd while Jerry and I stared at each other.

‘How about that then?’

Jerry shook his head.

‘I guess it’s bye-bye Denny.’

‘We could send him a letter.’

‘Ah come on, we’re going to have to tell him to his face.’

‘He’s going to be well upset.’

‘Maybe we could call him up?’

‘Who’s going to talk to him?’

‘Don’t look at me, why should I be the one?’

‘You’re the singer, the vocal one, you ought to do the talking.’

‘Bullshit.’

‘Maybe we should get him to come over and all tell him once.’

‘We could kill him.’

‘There’s an idea.’

‘I don’t see what we’re getting so hung up about, we’ve only got to fire the geezer. It shouldn’t be such a big deal.’

‘You tell him then.’

‘Hold on a minute, I don’t see why I’ve got to be the one.’

‘Somebody’s got to.’

‘We could send him a letter.’

‘We already went through that.’

‘We should have told him tonight after the gig.’

‘But we chickened out, didn’t we?’

‘We could leave it a couple of weeks.’ ‘And take a chance on blowing the deal with Jimmy?’

‘It’s got to be done. Apart from Jimmy, he’s getting such a twitch I don’t want to play with him.’

‘Its true what Jimmy said, he’s a wanker.’

‘Let’s kill him.’

‘We got to tell him tomorrow, for sure.’

‘For sure.’

We waited for Denny all afternoon feeling nervous and uncomfortable. We had cleared all the chicks, strays and other angers on out of the flat so we could do the deed in private. Finally the bell rang, and Jerry let him in. Denny sat down, and between him looking paranoid, and the rest of us avoiding is eyes, the atmosphere quickly got as thick as LA on a Tuesday afternoon. Connie rushed off to hide in the kitchen under the guise of making some tea, leaving Jerry and me to deal with the situation. I decided it was now or never.

‘Uh Denny... we’d like to have a chat with you about a few things...’

Denny had been staring at his boots, but as I spoke he looked p with a jerk.

‘Before you start, I think I’d better tell you something.’ ‘Yeah?’

‘I ... I think I’ve got to leave, it’s, like, I’m not really doing that I want to do. I mean...’

Jerry and I looked at each other, trying hard to hide our relief. Connie came in with the tea and Jerry broke the news to him.

‘Denny wants to leave.’

‘Does he… oh!’

Connie didn't handle it too well, he looked a shade too pleased about it.

We gave Denny a flat three minutes of 'Do you really want to split?' and 'Are you sure you're doing the right thing?', and then he stood up. I don't think he was able to take any more of our good manners.

'I'll see you guys around then?'

'Yeah, take care Denny.'

The very next morning, we went to see Jimmy DiAngelo in his Knightsbridge flat-cum-office. A chick let us in who looked like she'd fallen out of a copy of Harper's.

'Have you come to see Jimmy'?'

'Yeah.'

'Uncle?'

'That's right.'

'He's in here.'

She showed us into a large white room. White walls, white fluffy carpet, white velvet curtains. Jimmy sat in one corner in a big black leather armchair which was the only piece of furniture in the whole room, except for an elaborate tape and disc stereo system. Everything in the room looked expensive. Even Jimmy's T-shirt and faded jeans seemed to have an air of money. It takes a lot of class to look wealthy in bare feet.

Behind Jimmy, with his back to us, staring out of the window, was a huge spade. He didn't move as we came in, but Jimmy looked up.

'Elbowed the bass player?'

'Yup.'

'It took you long enough.'

We looked at the carpet, there was nothing we could say. Jerry signalled to the chick.

'Bring us some beers, will you darling. Okay, so now you want to talk business?'

Jerry nodded. The whole thing was too much for us. Jimmy had a set up that could make Dracula feel inadequate.

'Okay, sit down then.'

We settled ourselves awkwardly on the floor, but gained a brief respite as Jimmy's girl handed round glasses of what tasted like American beer. The spade was still looking out of the window.

'So what do you three want to do?'

'Be rock and roll stars.'

Jerry's confidence was gradually coming back, Jimmy nodded.

'It's a start at least. How do you see the band?'

'How do you mean?'

'You want to be rock and roll stars, so what kind of rock and roll stars do you want to be?'

'Rich ones?' -

'Those jokes would be cute if they didn't come from Beatles movie. Seriously, don't you have any ideas of what you want to do?'

I could see what he was getting at, but it was hard to define what I wanted the band to be in exact terms.

'It ought to be a rock and roll band, lots of moving and very loud. Bits of Dylan. the Stones, I dunno, maybe James
Brown. It's mainly a case of playing and seeing what comes out.' Jimmy looked at Connie and Jerry.

'Is that what you two think?'

They were silent for a while, then Jerry looked up.

'I guess so, pretty much.'

He went back to comparing his dirty boot with the clean carpet. Jimmy swivelled round in his chair and looked out of the window. There was a penetrating silence. You could almost hear yourself sweat.

The phone rang and the three of us jumped. Jimmy swung round to his original position and picked it up. He listened for long time, then said 'Yeah fine' and hung up. His attention turned back to us.

'You three smoke dope?' We hesitated. Then Jerry nodded. 'Yes.'

Jimmy grinned. 'Let's have a joint then.' He turned to the spade. 'Roll a joint for us. Eddie.'

The spade turned from the window.

'Sure.'

He walked out of the room and came back with a tray that held skins, matches and a bag of grass. He rolled the same small American grass joints that I remember Tricia and Cat had rolled back at Jerry's place in Cornwall the first night had met.

Eddie handed Jimmy the joint, and he picked up an ornate roach clip from the ashtray by his foot. After he had lit it turned back to the three of us on the floor.

'You want to hear what I think your group could be?'

'Sure.'

'Well, when I was watching you the other night, it occurred to me that you had the makings of possibly the most degenerate, evil-looking band ever, if a lot of work was done on

Connie laughed.

'That's nice.'

'I mean it. Some bands are the good guys, other bands the bad guys. You could be the all time bad guys with a bit luck.'

We all thought about it. Suddenly being presented to yourself as a potential monster was a bit of a shock. It was all very exciting. Jimmy was running on about his plans.

'I'd like to see you put together the kind of group that kids parents really hate. Not just would you like your daughter marry one, but would you let your daughter within ten mi of one, or your son, or your granny, or even the dog?'

'If it moves.'

'That's right.'

'There are a few practical problems.'

'Like?'

'Well, we don't have a bass player.'

'Don't worry about that. I've got a couple of guys in mind. A bass player and someone to play second guitar. What's next problem?'

'We've got a contract with Morrie Diamond.' 'I'll attend to Morrie. Next'?'

'Gear.'

'You'll get the gear you need when you need it. What else?'

'We've got no money, and we're not working.' Jimmy raised an eyebrow.

'Ah. Now it's time to get down to business. If you are into going along with my suggestions I'd like to manage and produce you. Until you're working I'll pay your bills and give ten pounds a week cash. After that you can pick up bread from me and I'll give you monthly accounts. I'll also fix you up with decent agency. Do we have a deal?'

The decision didn't take a moment.

'Yes, it sounds like exactly what we need.'

'Right then, you'd better have a look at these.'

He tossed us a bunch of papers stapled together. 'What are these?'

'My standard contracts.'

'Are these what you want us to sign?'

‘That’s right.’

Jerry began flipping through the contract.

‘Do you mind if we take a couple of days to look at these?’

It looked like Jerry was about to start the same stalling manoeuvre we had used on Morrie, but Jimmy wasn’t having any.

Why?’

‘Well…’

Jerry wasn’t expecting the blunt question.

‘...Maybe we should have a lawyer look at them.’

‘Leave it out, you’re not going to show those to a lawyer, I doubt if you even know one, so why come on with all this moody? Can you see anything wrong with them?’

‘Well ... no.’

‘Okay then, we might as well get the deal tied up. Pat!’

The chick came in.

‘Okay, give your full names to Pat, and she’ll type them in while we have another joint.’

With Jimmy things started to move at an alarming speed. He began dropping in on us at all manner of unlikely times, as though keeping us on the hop. It was on one of these visits, it must have been around eleven in the morning and I hadn’t even got up, that he marched in and tossed a bundle of papers to the bed.

‘It’s your contracts with Morrie Diamond, he wants you to have them back.’

I struggled to sit up.

‘What did you have to do to get them?’

‘Don’t ask.’

We never did find out exactly what went on between Jimmy and Morrie that day. The legend has it that Jimmy pulled a pair of plastic artificial knee-caps out of his pocket, and gave them to Morrie with an indication that, if he didn’t get the contracts back, Morrie might have need of them.

Apart from getting rid of Denny, there had been one other thing that Jimmy had insisted on. He wanted the name of the band changed. I think he had been reading Vance Packard and McLuhan, because he came out with this long rap about how the name Uncle had too many connotations of defeat an surrender to be applied to a successful band, so we were sent off to look for another one that evoked suitably degenerate images.

We worked our way through a totally unsuitable set of suggestions that ranged from the Pigfuckers to the Black Mass and then we gave up and decided to leave it, hoping inspiration would come to us.

It finally came on a Sunday afternoon. Connie and I were lying on the floor watching an Audie Murphy movie we had seen twice before, I think it was *Bullet for a Badman.* Jerry was lying on his bed reading. At that time, Sundays were slow
depressing days when we came down from Saturday nights. A day when we usually got rid of any chicks who were there early as possible, and then lay around feeling sorry for ourselves as we gradually detoxified.

It was thus a surprise when Jerry’s voice came from the bedroom between TV gunshots, particularly as he sounded vaguely excited.

‘I think I’ve got it!’

Connie and I looked at each other. ‘By George, he’s got it.’

‘No really. I think I’ve found the answer.’

He held up a copy of Burrough’s *Naked Lunch.* ‘There’s a name in here.’

‘Yeah? What is it?’

‘Willy’s Rats.’
‘Willy’s Rats?’
‘Willy’s Rats.’
There was a pause as we thought about it.
‘Willy's Rats?’
‘It’s certainly weird.’
Another pause.
‘It might just do.’

Mac hangs out the last note of *Keep Lovin' Me Baby,* and they're yelling and cheering.

Thank you!'

'Thank you!'

You can see their arms like a field of thick white marine plants as they hold them in the air applauding.

'All right!'

'Right!'

Jerry is up by his mike. 'Think we might go on all night!' There's another burst of cheering. 'Want us to go on all night?'

The affirmative yell comes back like a football cheer. It's all bullshit though, we'll be off the stage and out of the auditorium aide the next fifteen minutes.

Jerry is staying by the mikes so it doesn't seem like he's ready to do the next song. It looks like he feels it's right to do the rap, so Mac and I move up to our own mikes to take part and pick up as Jerry ad-libs it.

He starts off slow.

'listen.'

Pause.

'You know what they're saying about us?'

Another pause, there are scattered shouts from the back of the hall. I join in.

'You know what some old judge said about us'?' More shouts. Jerry again.

'He said we were corrupting western youth.' Mac this time.

'Us man, corrupting western youth, that's what that fucking d judge said.'

Me again, we've managed to start quite a barrage of shouting and Connie's begun tapping out a kind of marching beat. 'You think you're getting corrupted?'

There's a roar, mingled yeses and nos. Jerry starts yelling. 'Feel yourselves getting depraved'?'

Again the mixed roar, only louder. Mac holds up his hand 'Okay now, let's get this thing sorted out, how many of you fucking hippies have gone an' been corrupted?'

A loud chorus of yes.

'An' how many of you *ain't* been corrupted?'

An equally loud chorus of no.

'Then we better get on with it.'

Connie batters out a roll and Mac and Jerry manage to tin a leap in the air, both together. Then in unison they smash the opening chords out of their guitars, staggering backwards towards their amps.

I move to the back, where Chas hands me a tambourine then forward again, beating it on my thigh. In front of the mike I quickly wipe the sweat out of my eyes and take a deep breath. There are a lot of words to handle very quickly, almost the way Chuck Berry handles lyrics, mustn't stumble or dry up.

A head full of mercury,
Can make a man curse and shout,
A head full of vitamins
Is no way to go out.
A head full of everything
Don't point no way to go

And a head full of nothing
Can cloud your mind like snow

God, I'm sweating like a pig, the black satin suit is wringing wet, even the backs of my legs feel damp. The jump suit must be clinging to me like when Bardot climbs out of a river. Remember those movies? The ones where either Brigitte Bardot or Sophia Loren was always getting soaked to the skin.

A heavy legged woman
Can make a man insane
That kind smiling woman
Can set fire to your brain
A woman with a red dress on
Will let the people know
But a woman who says nothing
Can cloud your head like snow.

I'm beginning to get short of breath, high-speed singing and shaking your arse takes it out of you under the heat of the lights. I take it easy, just snapping my leg, camp hand on my hip. Jerry and Mac move in, and I'm glad they are there to help me out with the chorus.

Don't send me no doctor
Tell him see Miss Caroline
Don't write my mother
Just call up Miss Marilyn
Call up Miss Virginia
Tell her I won't last
Send a cab for Angela
See she gets here fast.

Jerry and Mac go into a break and I retreat, beating my tambourine, arms held in the air. I reach the wall of speakers and fall back against them in a crucifixion pose. It looks dramatic, but in fact I'm taking a rest. It's so fucking hot, and I'm 'waiting for the lights to pull into just spots on Mac and Jerry, so I can down another beer and just lie back against the speakers. I take a look at Connie, he's going like a maniac. I hope to god he doesn't dry out and collapse.

Jerry and I were sitting at home, a little out of it, having done up a quantity of Lebanese dope and a bottle of wine. We were listening to Lightnin' Hopkins, and feeling in that state of being vaguely horny, but too wasted to do much about it.

The bell rang, jarring us from behind Po' Lightnin', and I got up to answer it. It was Jimmy. He walked in with that air of inspecting us that he seemed to have got down to a fine art.

'Still playing that nigger music?'

We let the tired racist joke go, we were more interested in the two geezers who had followed him in. They didn't look like the usual mates that Jimmy was prone to bring with him on his surprise visits, in fact they looked pretty much freak like ourselves. Jimmy waved a hand in their direction.

'This is Mac, and that's Alan.' I smiled at them.

'Hi, I'm Lou, and this is Jerry.' Jerry raised a hand.

'Hello.'

The three of them sat down and Lightnin' Hopkins regained our attention, although the question still remained why Jimmy had brought round these two scruffy hippies. Knowing Jimmy it would be a while before he got round to it, and the only thing that Jerry and I could do was to bide our time, stoke him up with our good Leb, and wait. Eventually, after a lot Jimmy's sinister small talk, he finally got round to it.

'Mac and Alan are the guys I think might do to make up the rest of the band.'

'Really.'

It's spooky when you get the first sight of someone who you may be going to spend thousands of hours of your locked up in a van with. It must be the way medieval child brides felt when the family produced their husband.

It turned out that Mac and Alan were sole survivors of one of Jimmy's more psychotic loser bands, and like us, they were on ten pounds spendies and getting their bills paid. It seemed that Jimmy had this habit of collecting spare musicians, putting them on a retainer, then grouping them together to find possible hit combinations. We didn't mind too much because, with Jimmy paying for rehearsal time, it gave us a chance to suss out these new additions without having to commit ourselves to going on the road with them.

As it happened, Alan and Mac were just what we needed. Alan was a driving bass player, which was weird because in most other respects he was the closest thing to a catatonic still functioning in society. On stage he would stay rigid somewhere near the back, with his long ringlets completely covering his feminine but rather negative face, and the hard roar from his amps seemed to come from a totally different person.

Nobody could accuse Mac of being catatonic. Although he was not as much of a loudmouth as Jerry, what he lacked in quantity he made up for in being totally gross. His ability occasionally to conjure up extreme fantasies of rocker nastiness could top anything Jerry might produce, and it was fortunate that they were rather widely spaced.

It was much the same with Mac's music. Initially Jerry had been a bit reserved about having to play with another guitarist, but the situation sorted itself out almost perfectly since, for most of the time, Mac was quite happy to tuck himself alongside Alan to provide a really solid backing, leaving Jerry to be quite clearly number one guitar player. When Mac did take a solo, there were occasions when he came out with a real stroke of genius that surpassed most of what Jerry could do, but these didn't happen too often, and both their egos seemed satisfied with the relationship.

We rehearsed for about a month and then Jimmy came to see us, and it was decided we were about ready to start working.

He had fixed a deal with one of the biggest agencies, International Talent, and they started to book us out, at first for bout the same money we had been getting as Uncle.

The first gigs we played were tryouts at a few suburban rock clubs that gave us a chance to iron out our act
without anyone too important seeing it.
Jimmy came to see us at a couple of these places, and although he seemed quite pleased with the way we were working out, his main comment was that we weren't working hard enough. I was quite into throwing myself about on stage but he insisted that Mac and Jerry had to put on more of visual show.

The out of town clubs seemed quite pleased with us, and we were given return bookings in all but a couple who found our act objectionable. Jimmy began putting the next stage of his plan into operation.

Exposure was the name of the game, which meant that the greatest number of people should see us in the shortest possible time. To that end, he began wheeling and dealing to get us on the bill of a seven band tour spectacular headlined by an American surfing group who were cashing in on their last dying period of international fame.

When Jimmy had signed the contract for the tour, he decided that we needed new equipment. We were trundled down to the Marshall factory where Jimmy did some involved deal which ended with each guitarist having a hundred-watt stack plus a three hundred PA, then on to a Charing Cross Road store where we scored the extra bass drum for Connie and bunch of mikes.

At the end of this little shopping expedition we were into Jimmy for nearly two grand, which gave him exclusive owner-ship of our right arms and a few inches of leg. This was added to when one morning Jimmy sent Eddie round to rush us off to a place on the King's Road to cop clothes for the tour. Apparently our Levis and boots didn't make it. I picked out kind of Victorian black velvet suit that made me look like cross between Aubrey Beardsley and a homosexual undertaker. The others all found themselves something vaguely similar, except for Connie who chose a red leather jacket and appalling black and yellow check hipsters, and Jerry who insisted on white double breasted Al Capone suit that caused us untold problems by having to be cleaned all the time.

Equipped, dressed and up to our necks in debt to Jimmy DiAngelo, we rehearsed a couple of times, and then we were about ready to start the tour. We had even been given a new roadie. Tony paid him twenty quid a week plus the running cost on his van, a long wheel base transit, a regular status symbol. It meant he was making more money than we were but apparently he had a reputation as being very good. His name was Chas, and he was as big as any two of us put together.

The tour was a killer, we did sixteen towns in twenty days, and a good few places put on two shows a night. I suppose it was one of the last of the old fashioned cinema and town hail tours that I used to go and see when I was a kid, the kind that had Gene Vincent or Billy Fury topping the bill.

The schedule was straight murder. Drive to the gig, anything up to seventy or eighty miles. Check in the hotel, find the theatre, check the gear after Chas had set it up. Hang out in the dressing room until it was time to play. After the show it was either partying or back to the hotel. Then the next morning Chas would gather us up to repeat the process. By the fourth day we were spending all our time either asleep or out of our minds.

I'd never seen so many pills. The surfers were a bunch of mindless thirty-year-olds who seemed to be fed them by their roadie so they could raise the energy to go on stage. He might

as well have put them in cases along with the gear for all the notice they took of anything.

Their amphetamine psychosis penetrated down to us lower ranks, and it was only handfuls of Dexedrine and Drinamyl at enabled us to get going through this minor rock and roll marathon.

But there were consolations. We were playing to the largest audiences we had ever seen, and even though it was only fifteen minutes at the beginning of the show, the big stage, the theatre lighting and new equipment was an entirely new buzz, tiny taste of what being a big band was all about, and although we were overshadowed by the better known bands, we seemed to go down quite well.

The chicks turned up in droves, a much higher quality than we usually attracted because, of course, they were drawn in like moths round a flame to make the big names. We merely pounded up the ones who failed to make the stars, and sneaking them in and out of the cheap bed and breakfast joints that Chas and Jimmy had fixed us up with made us really feel like hell raising pro rockers.

In Carlisle I went to see Angie and stayed with her since the following day was one of our days off. I hadn't really planned to go back with her, but when she turned up in the dressing room before the second show, I hadn't the gall to ignore her and go on with my scheme to pull the little yummy with big tits that Connie was chatting up.

After the show Chas dropped us off in the mean street, and once inside the one down, two up, we went straight to bed. It was as though she kept a card index of all the guys she had brought home. She went through a blow by blow replay of the first time, it was uncanny. She seemed totally into keeping me satisfied, although without the slightest idea of perhaps doing something original. After the striptease and fucking I fell asleep almost immediately, but was woken up a few hours later by Angie wanting it again.

'Again?'

'Pretty please.'

Her fingernails were running over my stomach.

'I don't think I could.' She pouted.

'Why not lover, don't you fancy me any more?'

'Sure I do, but I've been on the road for god knows how long. I'm knackered.'

'Suit yourself.'

She rolled over, turning her back to me, and I busily went back to sleep.

In the morning I woke to find her kneeling on the bed holding out a cup of tea. She was stark naked.

'I told Joan to tell them I was sick.'

'Sick? Who?'

'At the factory.'

I remembered it was Tuesday.

'Why?'

'You told me last night you had a day off. I thought we could stay in bed, especially since you're so tired.'

She grinned and handed me the tea, then twitched her arse round to the other side of the bed and bounded into it.

We were in the middle of energetically balling when there was a terrible pounding on the front door.

'Who the fuck's that?'

'If you pull it out I'll go and see.'

She wrapped a housecoat round herself and disappeared downstairs. Moments later she returned followed by Chas.

'The rest of us are going to Newcastle with the truck. We reckon with no gig today we

might as well hang round there as here. What are you going to do?'

'When are you leaving?'

'Now.'

I thought for a while. I could stay where I was and screw Angie or go with the lads and search for pastures new. It was a problem. I felt bad about ditching Angie after she had arranged to miss work. I thought of taking her to Newcastle, but rejected the idea.

'I think I'll stay here and get the train over tomorrow.'

I immediately regretted the decision, I knew in a few hours Carlisle would depress me, but it was too late, Chas was already clumping down the stairs.

We stayed in bed till about three in the afternoon. Angie seemed insatiable, but I started to get hungry and suggested we go out and eat. She seemed quite willing to cook something and bring it to me in bed, but I insisted I needed a walk and we got up and dressed.

The street really brought me down. All these people scuffling about with little hope beyond the bookie shop. Wandering around in my London clothes with this chick I'd been balling all morning, strolling out with nothing better to do than go and eat, seemed to draw their hostility like a magnet. The fear that had been instilled into them since birth and kept them at their mind-wrecking jobs didn't allow for something like me. They'd been told that if you didn't get up for the early hooter you died. I was walking proof that their conditioning was all fiction, and in their numb way they hated me.

We found a Chinese restaurant in the main street, and ordered what proved to be rather inferior sweet and sour pork. I wished I could get Angie to break out of this terrible routine. I could see how she clung desperately to guys like me, anxiously fucking to escape the grey streets, doing everything to please in order to make us come back again, but unable to make a real break. If I persuaded her to come to London she would lust take it as an invitation to live with me, and I wasn't prepared for anything like that. There seemed like nothing I could do. In a few years she'd probably marry and then she'd join the other women on the doorsteps. Maybe she'd have a bit of a reputation and a few false memories of wild nights with rock musicians. Beyond that, she would be the same as the others.

I had to make it. I had to be so famous that these pinched stone streets could never ever touch me.

We finished the meal, and I played with my coffee, wondering what to do. I could see us going back to the cramped little house and bed, or more likely fucking some more in front of the children's shows on TV. Then an idea struck me.

'Let's go to the pictures.'

Angie smiled.

'All right.'

We walked until we came to a cinema. It was a rerun of *The Magnificent Seven* and we wandered in for three and nine's worth of brutal fantasy. The rest of the audience were a handful of old age pensioners and a few kids who had skipped school. We sat at the back and fondled each other while Steve McQueen and James Coburn went through their routines.

Afterwards we bought a bottle of wine and went home. We did end up fucking in front of the TV, but at least it was an adult show.

And it's even hard
To carry your load
When you gotta face the people
Standin' at the side of the road.

Jimmy's voice cut through the backing track in my headphones.

'I think you were flat on standing.'

'Okay, let's go back to the top.'

‘Okay, just running back.’

I counted through the intro and started singing again. We were recording at last, making that first single.

The tour had finished just before Christmas, and it had helped a lot. People had seen us, we’d been mentioned in a *Melody Maker* review of the package, they had called us ‘driving and sinister’ and Jimmy was well pleased. He had done a deal for us to record for Presence, one of the independent labels that had used the pirate radio stations to break the stranglehold the big corporations had on rock music.

We originally wanted to try for Decca or EMI, but Jimmy had told us no, the corporations would be finished inside of five years. We agreed, although the picture changed slight when we discovered that Jimmy owned thirty per cent
Presence, and that his deal had mainly consisted of his right hand bargaining with his left.

We spent most of the January lull doing the A and B side of the single, plus a few odd tracks for an eventual album.

The little four-track studio was a miracle of technology to us. The control room was like a starship, and watching Jimmy
and Stew, the little Cockney engineer, going through all these Phil Spector routines, it began to seem as though we were really moving off towards the magic land of rock and roll stars.

Eventually *Standing at the Side of the Road* was selected a the A side and a release date was set for mid-March. We had done it, and all we could do was wait.

Waiting, however, wasn’t too bad. We were working a lot and Jimmy gave us a rise so we were taking home twenty quid a week, with Jimmy picking up all our bills. Living was starting to get good, for along with the money we had started to get into the swing of life on the road. We began to meet other bands, and the service areas on the motorways ceased to be just places to fill yourself with greasy food, and became somewhere you could meet friends and play rough boisterous games that provided a release from the long hours of boredom sitting in the truck.

Racing vans became a prime sport among groups who owned the fast Ford Transits. A transit can be pushed to around ninety-five with a bit of work on the engine, and although they sway like a pig at high speed, you can keep sufficiently insulated on wine, dope and speed to stop your brain picturing what would happen if you hit something or ran off the road. With half a ton of gear stacked up behind you there was little chance of surviving a collision or a front wheel blow out, and the sight of a filthy truck swaying past a family saloon whose driver thought he was already going fast would strike fear and loathing into the hearts of solid citizens.

To the citizens, the motorways are a handy means of transport, but to the rock band they are a home and playground. Sure it’s insane, but who can remain normal driving thousand of miles a month to bring fantasies to all the Angies throughout the country?

In the Blue Boar service area the hot little boppers were a long way behind, just tension pains in the back of my head from being drunk hours before, gritty eyes and a plate of sausage, egg, beans and chips.

I drank three glasses of milk to comfort my bone dry amphetamine mouth, and straight away started to feel sick. I was just about to stagger back to the truck when the Sect walked in, and we all hung on to talk to them. They had just driven from Manchester and looked as rotten as we felt.

Very soon we had fallen to razzing each other, and the ritual insults could only lead to the tension release of a challenge to race back to London.

‘Fuckin’ race yer, won’t we.’

‘Right, you’re on.’

Then we were hurrying out to the car park, and scrambling into the truck. The two of us rolled side by side down the slip road, and on to the motorway. It was five a.m. and there was no other traffic about. At least while racing them we didn't have to worry about Chas dropping off to sleep.

Side by side, the two trucks went through the gears, and the clock moved rapidly up until it was swinging between seventy and eighty. The Sect were right alongside us, matching our speed, and between them the two trucks straddled the entire southbound carriageway.

We went on like this for about five minutes, the window wound down so Chas could shout insults at the other truck. Then Connie wanted to roll a joint, so the window was shut, but we carried on side by side. We rushed up a slight gradient. under a bridge and over the crest of the slope and down again into a gradual dip.

And into thick fog.

Apart from Connie we were all peering out of the windscreen. It was like being tear-gassed, one minute there was a road in the headlights, then just white blurred nothing, racing past us.

'Fuck.'

'A time warp.'

'Sodding fog.'

Connie looked up from the back.

'How fast are we going?'

Chas was peering intently into the fog. ''Bout seventy.'

'Are we going to slow down?'

Chas glanced at the truck still beside us. 'They're not.'

Connie lit the joint.

'I suppose that means we won't.'

There was one slight problem. We were in the slow lane, and if there happened to be a coal lorry chugging along at about thirty that was the lane it would be in. We would plough into it while the Sect would flash past it.

Chas put his foot down to try to pass the other truck. We topped eighty, but they also accelerated and we stayed side by side.

It was crazy, but neither of us was prepared to drop back. We raced on, unable to see anything.

Suddenly, out of the fog a red light appeared right in front of us. Chas hit the brakes and swung us to the right. We were all thrown around in a shower of the smaller pieces of equipment. The Sect raced ahead, and I caught sight of a frightened motorcyclist staring at us as we skidded round him.

'Fuck, we've lost them!'

Chas was furious, and he slammed his foot down to try to catch the other band, but up ahead we could see their tail light getting smaller in the thinning mist.

The weeks around when we were to release the single were filled with those little ego boosting trips that make you feel that maybe you really are somehow set apart from the herd. We did photo sessions, posters went up around Iondon, the record was previewed on Radio Caroline, and we did our first interview for a music paper.

The guy from *Disc* was a quiet little man with a Paul McCartney haircut and a face that reminded one of a rabbit. He puffed tentatively on the joints that we kept giving him, and looked profoundly worried about it. He took his job very seriously, and we didn't help him too much, but he went manfully on with his questions.

'What do you think is the main influence on the band?'

'Dunno, Bob Dylan?'

'James Brown.'

‘Otis.’

Jerry grinned.

‘How about Aleister Crowley?’ The *Disc* reporter looked puzzled. ‘Who?’

‘He was a satanist and a dope-fiend.’

The *Disc* man looked unhappy but scribbled in his notebook.

‘So you think drugs are important?’ ‘Definitely.’

‘For sure, you see so much more in everything.’ ‘Levels your head and clears your mind.’ I tried to cut off the comedy routine.

‘Seriously, I think we are all going to find that drugs and music are going to change the world even more than the start of rock and roll did in the fifties.’

The *Disc* man frowned.

‘You really think rock and roll has changed the world?’ Jerry looked hard at the reporter.

‘Don’t you?’ ‘I don’t know.’

‘And you’re writing about it?’

‘But...’

‘Listen, kids watched Elvis and they knew. It confirmed what they had always suspected. That the stuff they were told in school, God, motherhood, apple pie and a fair day’s work were a con, they were bullshit, complete rubbish.’

Mac suddenly joined in.

‘Rock and roll has become like a secret language, you either understand it or you don’t. It talks about all the things that our parents thought were forbidden.’

The reporter looked more and more bewildered, the interview was becoming a sounding board for everyone’s pet theories. As we ran on the guy from *Disc* tried to interject a question.

‘How do you think all this relates to what you’re doing with the band?’

I looked round, the others seemed to be waiting for me to answer.

‘I suppose you could say we are part of it, we show people things that they don’t normally think about. The dark things that this society has tried to forget. The things it’s tried to suppress by sweeping them under the carpet.

‘I guess it’s something like voodoo, a chance for people to get their rocks off behind these bits of weirdness, to bring out all their nasties in a way that nobody will get hurt. You know what I mean?’

The reporter. who had been scribbling furiously in his little book, looked up and nodded. He didn't look as though he bad understood a word. Jerry decided to throw his bit in.

‘I suppose we let people be evil by proxy.’

We were going to hear that quoted a great deal over the next couple of years.

The reporter split after a polite interval, saying he would contact Jimmy’s office for a photo, and left us sitting looking at each other. We had never really got into what we thought we were doing with the band before, at least not in such literal terms, and it took some digesting. It was Mac who broke the silence.

‘Is that what we’re up to then?’ Connie grinned.

‘We were making it up as we went along.’

‘Sounded good though, didn’t it?’

‘Fucking amazing.’

Jerry was looking thoughtful.

‘Maybe that’s really what it’s all about. I mean, we must have had all that stuff knocking around inside our heads.’

I could see his point.

‘It all, like, ties in with what Jimmy’s always on about It seems to me that all we’ve done is put it into words and refined it a bit.’

Jerry was nodding in agreement.

'Maybe we should start working on this evil-by-proxy bit. We ought to be putting a lot more weirdness into the act. We've got to start creating some kind of legend.'

The *Disc* interview came out the following week. The reporter had missed the point of most of what we had been saying, but he put us across as a kind of mean, sinister bunch of wild boys, and he had at least managed to get in the evil-byproxy quotation. Jimmy thought the whole thing was wonderful.

It also shifted Jerry's brain into high gear, and he began coming out with outrageous ideas to make the stage act more depraved.

'We could have a row of dancers in kind of thirties Berlin drag, you know, black stockings and suspenders.'

'It would be expensive.'

'Sure, but it'd be pretty weird.'

'Yeah, but we can't go dragging a dozen half naked scrubbers round with us.'

'I don't see why not.'

Fortunately Jerry's ideas came and went so fast that he didn't do too much about them apart from talking.

'Listen, why don't we get a load of dolls, fill them with fake blood and carve them up with knives?'

'Yeah sure, anything.'

Although Jerry didn't put his schemes into practice there did seem to be a lot more violence coming into the act. Jerry seemed at times to fight with his guitar as though he hated it, himself and the audience. It spread through the whole group, and even the R & B songs we still played took on a kind of swamp magic blackness. It also seemed to catch on with audiences, and more and more of them began to turn up to watch the spectacle.

The first week the single came out we rushed out to score the music papers. Of course we were not in the charts, but we did get reviewed in *Melody Maker* and *Disc.*

Melody Maker called it a 'hard driving possible hit, with an eerie sound and traces of a Dylan influence', while *Disc* talked about 'a creditable first effort by the band who seem to be trying to corner the market in nastiness'.

And that was it. All we could do was to play *Standing at the Side of the Road* at all our gigs and hope it caught at least six bob's worth of the punters' imagination.

Jimmy seemed to be working as hard as he could on it. We were getting plays on Radio London, Caroline and Luxembourg, but he hadn't yet made too much headway with TV, and both Ready Steady Go and Top of the Pops were holding on to see if we would do anything.

Our faces did stare moodily out of the doomy photographs that Presence used in their music press ads, and more and more kids were coming to see us. So much so that we had the reputation of being able to fill a good size club on our own. Our money gradually got closer to the elusive three figures. Our spirits were dampened a little when on the second week of release we still hadn't made it into the charts.

We talked to Jimmy about whether he could buy us into the charts but he seemed to think that on our first single he'd rather spend money on promotion than chart rigging.

I suppose it was the disappointment of our nonappearance in the top thirty for the third week that caused Jerry to cook up the whip joke.

We were playing at a college in Reading, double-billed with a bunch of fairly successful John Mayall copyists, and the hail was filled with about seven hundred students and local mods.

The blues band had exhausted their repertoire of Elmore James numbers, and it was time

for us to go on for our final set.

Their presentation had been typical blues band sloppy, and we decided to do everything really fast. Jerry, Mac and Alan tuned their guitars in the dressing room and we literally ran on, banged in the plugs and stormed into *Standing.*

It's hard the soles are out of your shoes,
It's hard when stuck with the highway blues,
It's hard motorcycle poet don't come,
It's hard when you can't speak to anyone,
It's even hard to carry your load
When you gotta face the people
Standing at the side of the road.

We rocked through it. staggering and jerking, pushing out as much energy as we could. In the solo Jerry tucked his guitar into his crotch and with his right arm flung above his head he did a long James Brown heel and toe slide, holding down a long sustained note by hammering the strings down on the fretboard with the fingers of his left hand.

We did a nifty finish and took great pains to tell everyone that it was our fine new single. We did two more songs and then went into our really long version of *Who Do You Love.* Connie would start it with a long piece of Bo Diddley drumming while the rest of us stood around in a group looking mean. Eventually we would fan out, Jerry and Mac would hit a screeching chord and let the feedback hang while I started screaming.

The words of *Who Do You Love* lend themselves perfectly to gothic swamp violence.

I walk forty-seven miles of barbed wire
I use a cobra snake for a necktie
I got a brand new house on the roadside
Made from rattlesnake hide.

I was hunched over the mike stand, making Count Dracula gestures with my hand and jerking my body to the beat.

Tombstone hand and graveyard mind
I'm just twenty-two and I don't mind dying.

I suppose *Positively Fourth Street* and *Who Do You Love* are the two songs I would most like to have written.

I go out to town, use a rattlesnake whip
Take it easy Arlene, don't give me no lip.

I swung round and punched a cymbal. The three Dex I'd taken before going on were beginning to get to me, and although my hand was bleeding I didn't feel anything.

I threw the mike stand to one side, and Jerry and I advanced on the audience. While he began his solo I held my bleeding hand under the noses of some chicks in the front row.

Then everything got quieter and I did a kind of Elvis, legs apart middle of stage, cradling the mike.

The night was dark, the sky was blue
Down the alley the ice wagon flew.

It was at times like that I wished we could carry lighting with us. It would have made so much difference.

Who do you love?
Who do you love, babe?

The band began to build up behind me and into a long, long instrumental passage where Jerry and Mac really stretched out while I camped around playing maraccas and occasionally shouting into the mike. For some time we had been using smoke bombs, one of Jerry's schemes that actually proved practicable, and when I came back in with the *Who Do You*

Love chorus, it was the cue for Chas to start setting up the bombs behind the amps.

After we had been roaring through the chorus for some time, I gave Chas the signal to start them going.

Who do you love?

Who do you love?

Who do you love babe?

Who do you love?

I caught Chas's eye and gave him the nod to light the smoke bombs.

Who do you love?

Who do you love?

A sharp line of stinging pain flashed across my back. I wondered if I'd been electrocuted, it didn't feel like the normal kind of shock. I swung round and saw Jerry, standing in the smoke that billowed from the back of the stage. He was brandishing a six-foot stock whip, the kind you can get in Indian novelty shops.

He swung it again and I threw up an arm to protect myself. The whip curled around my arm and I grabbed the end of it and jerked. The whip came out of his hand, and he staggered back against his amps, grinning like a maniac.

I seized the handle of the whip and swung it over my head and turned back to the audience.

Okay you fuckers, who do you love?

I tried to crack the whip over the heads of the first couple of rows and they immediately tried to push back away from me. Meanwhile the crowd at the back had begun to push forward to get a better view of what was going on. The middle of the hail became a crush of struggling people.

I said who do you love?

The smoke bombs had about run down, and the thick white chemical smoke was beginning to thin out a bit. I kept swinging the whip around my head.

Who do you love?

Yeah, who do you love?

Hearing Jerry's voice join in I turned to look at him. He was at the front of the stage, his guitar held over his head, the volume cranked right up so a howl of feedback threatened to rupture his speakers. His eyes were closed, and he was yelling into his mike.

Who do you love?

Who do you love?

He suddenly jerked, turned and lurched back into hi5 speakers with such force that Chas had to jump and grab them to stop them crashing over.

Again and again Jerry threw himself against the speakers a~ though determined to destroy both himself and them in an orgy of electronic rape. I swung the whip towards him, *trying* inexpertly to make the speakers stop the force of the blow.

Connie, Mac and Alan had fallen into a single funereal beat while this little drama had been going on, and jerking in time to it, Jerry slowly sank to his knees.

Then Connie erupted, standing up and just walking through the kit so drums seemed to roll in every direction. He went on walking straight off the stage, then Mac and Alan propped their guitars against their amps and followed him off. Jerry stood up, let his guitar fall, I threw the whip at the back of the stage, and we too ran for the wings. Chas cut the power and for a moment there was silence. Then the audience started to roar. It wasn't like applause, it was a kind of animal reaction.

I flopped into a chair in the dressing room. One thing was clear, we weren't going to do any encores.

The routine with the whip was so successful that we kept it in the act after that first night,

and began to work more and more effects around it. One of the first was for Jerry and me to get extension leads for his guitar and my mike so, whenever possible, we could jump from the stage down into the audience, clearing a space in the front rows for a strange face to face confrontation as we advanced on them like a nightmare Wyatt Earp and Doe Holliday, laughing as they retreated. It was like an electronic version of the dragon in a medieval mumming play, plunging into the crowd and forcing them to retreat in mock terror.

We also began to camp it up a good deal more, limp wristed, hand on hip gestures, lots of rings and dark eye makeup. We managed, however, to avoid overdoing it and falling into cheap get-you-ducky-I'll-hit-you-with-my-handbag poofism that a lot of bands, particularly in the North. used to get a cheap laugh. The image we tried to project was a combination of Brecht, Berlin in the thirties, and characters from Beardsley prints. I suppose that sounds kind of pretentious for what was really just a rock and roll band, but at the time we took ourselves very seriously, and the methedrine convoluted our thinking to such an extent that we began to picture ourselves as apocalyptic horsemen riding into these provincial towns and presenting the kids with a pageant of evil that held out tantalizing hints of de Sade and Nazi mysticism. Like I said, we took ourselves very seriously.

Not that we had everything our own way, there were occasions when the audience would hit back at our assaults on their fears and prejudices.

There was the incident in Plymouth when we were lucky to escape with our lives and equipment in one piece.

It was a college gig, but lacking a big enough hall of their own, the students had rented some kind of council building, the assembly rooms, town hail or some such place with marble pillars and rotten acoustics, I forget its exact name.

A couple of local groups filled the first half, and after an interval when a student DJ played Motown records, we came on for the last hour.

There were about eight hundred people, and after about fifteen minutes we had them leaping about merrily. It seemed like a good situation, and we cooked along with a healthy collection of college chicks in front of the stage, until about twenty minutes before we were due to close the show there was a kind of commotion, right over the far side of the hail by the main entrance, and in marched a team of about thirty teddy boys.

It was so weird. They weren't actually in the full Edwardian drag. They had heavy greased DAs, quiffs and sideburns, but their suits were the kind of bum-freezer Italian that came after the original drapes, and their feet were strapped up in winkle pickers rather than crepe creepers. Despite this it was still a pretty strange sight at a college dance in the year Bob Dylan fell off his motorcycle.

The teds made a slow circuit of the hail, stumbling a bit, as though they had just been thrown out of the pub, and eventually homed in on the group of chicks in front of the stage, after picking up pints of beer from the bar.

For a while they stood there looking at us in what seemed like dumb amazement, then after a while their attention turned to the women. With much haw-hawing and nudging they started a clumsy campaign to get themselves some girl students.

Although their conversation was inaudible, it was obvious that their proposition was that the chicks should stop watching these dirty homosexuals, and come off with some real red-blooded men like themselves. The girls responded by telling the teds to fuck off, and at that they turned brutishly sullen, and lacking any other immediate target, they began to direct their resentment towards the band.

Their first move was to press to the very front of the stage. where they leaned on the edge, leering up at us, swilling their beer and making smart remarks. As each of them finished his pint, he banged it down on the front of the stage, I imagine in the hope of tripping one of us as we moved, and very soon there was a neat row of beer mugs right across the stage where

the footlights would have been if the hail had run to any.

I suppose the incident might have ended there, except that Jerry and I, full of speed and self confidence, took it into our heads to mince along the front of the stage and delicately kick the glasses off the stage and on to the floor.

As the first ones bounced at the teds' feet they turned mean. One of them grabbed a mug and hurled it at Jerry. He ducked and it hit his amplifier. Quickly he stooped down, grabbed the mug and slung it straight back at the line of teds. Although it missed them, and, in fact, hit a student in the second row, it seemed to be the signal for all out war, and the teds started to come over the edge of the stage.

I grabbed the mike stand and swung it at the head of one who was climbing over on to the stage right in front of me. The cast iron base hit him a glancing blow on the forehead and he fell back with blood pouring down his face. Beside me Jerry had booted another square in the jaw, but despite our initial advantage there were clearly enough of them to beat the shit out of us easily, and seeing Chas and a bunch of stewards swarming to the rescue, I decided it was time to be somewhere else.

Luckily, the door to the dressing room was just at the back of the stage, and I ducked through it just behind Connie and Jerry, slammed it behind me and fell down the steep flight of stairs.

Inside the dressing room we bolted the door, and stared at each other as the sounds of battle filtered down to us.

'Jesus Christ, I thought they were going to kill us!'

'They still might, if they break in here.'

'What's happening to the fucking gear?'

'At least we got the guitars *off.'*

Connie looked up in alarm.

'My fucking drums are still up there.'

'You want to go and get them?'

'No way, you can get new drums. New bones are hard to come by.'

Mac pointed at Jerry.

'It's that bastard's fault, what did you want to hurl a pint pot at a fucking army of hostile teds for?'

Jerry shrugged.

'It seemed like a good idea at the time.'

'That's what they said about starting World War Two.' The conversation was cut short by a terrible pounding on the dressing room door. We all froze.

'Oh God!'

The pounding came again, then, to our relief, we heard Chas's voice.

'Open the sodding door.'

Connie pulled back the bolt and the door swung open. Chas came in followed by two coppers. One of his eyes was swollen and rapidly starting to close. The policeman looked round at us.

'Show's over lads. You'd best stay in the hall, though. Just until we've cleared the street.'

Connie looked at Chas.

'What's happened to the gear?'

Chas was tenderly fingering his eye.

'It's been knocked about a bit but most of it's okay.'

'How about the drums?'

'They're okay, I managed to pull them out of the way.'

The policemen left the dressing room, and we all followed them out. The stage was a shambles, but on examination, it seemed that there was little more than superficial damage.

One of Mac's stacks had been knocked over, and the drums were in an untidy heap in a corner at the back, but nothing seemed to have really been smashed. Mac stood in front of Jerry's speakers.

'Fucking marvellous isn't it, he starts a whole bleeding riot, and his gear doesn't even get touched.'

Jerry grinned.

'Me and God have an understanding.'

Chas peered around with his good eye.

'I reckon we were fucking lucky.'

It was only later that we found out just how lucky we had been. It seemed that after the teds had been thrown out of the ball by the police and stewards, they had rampaged round the back and found one of the local groups' vans. Thinking it was ours, they'd smashed the windows, and then climbed inside and stomped on their gear and instruments until it was a complete write-off. The thought of how the little band must have saved for years to buy their stuff only to get it wrecked on account of us, really upset us for at least an hour.

The 'evil-by-proxy' act didn't always work out as badly as it did in Plymouth. In most places it seemed to go down quite well, with the audience getting off behind the same kind of creepy thrill that, I suppose, was the underlying element that caused the success of horror movies, the big dipper and Hitler.

For a start, we began to lose a lot of whips, as they became an immediate target for the souvenir hunters who seem to swarm over the stage looking for discarded drumsticks and other fetish objects left lying about by the group.

The second and more noticeable result of the changes in the act was that we began to attract really strange women. It seemed that as the band's performances became more perverse, we stopped getting the usual plump little scrubbers, like Angie. who just wanted to screw, and instead a new kind of weirdo started to hang around the dressing room, watching us in fascination as we towelled ourselves off and packed away our stuff after we had finished playing.

Although they came in all shapes and sizes, the new kind of bird invariably conformed to a set type. They were intelligent enough to improvise baroque fantasies, but not so intelligent as to be really smart, and they seemed to have a tendency to awkwardness. A high proportion had authoritarian, often Catholic upbringings, which they were trying hard to get away from, and the product of this seemed to be a universal need to be degraded. Where the Angies wanted to be fucked, this new set of girls wanted to be fucked over, provided it was accompanied with a few gothic trappings.

Jerry revelled in this new kind of attention, and again and again he would return from gigs with a new prize, and his room would resound with slaps, moans and the crack of his belt. Now and again the door would open and either Jerry would emerge, wrapped in a dressing gown, to get a drink or some dope, or some anguished little lady would rush through into the bathroom, usually naked, as Jerry had a perverse habit of not letting them borrow a shirt or blanket to cover themselves with on these trips, and Connie and I were treated to a fleeting display of the red marks across their backs or bottoms.

Not that we sat around in a state of celibacy, passing moral judgements. The rest of us were more than happy to bring home our own quota, and if the ladies expected us to beat them, tie them up or indulge in anal intercourse, we were not about to blow our image by refusing.

I suppose the high proportion of these sexual oddities that we had begun to attract had the effect on us of bringing out our own sadism and general weirdness, which was never really

all that latent.

The hangups of all these chicks, as they paraded through our homes and dressing rooms, distorted our view of reality with their constant presence. Our sense of any kind of norm ceased to function much beyond them, and it began to seem as though the whole world wanted us to abuse and inflict injury on it. In simple terms, what had once seemed perverse and bizarre now began to seem normal, and since we had a strong attraction to the bizarre in the first place, our mode of living got rapidly stranger and stranger.

The increasing numbers of masochistic women making a beeline for the band became a group joke.

'It's easy to tell, just squeeze their nipples till it hurts and see if they moan and lay back, or ask you to stop.'

The horrid little test was Jerry's uniquely coarse way of summing up the situation, but in practice nearly all of them lay back and moaned, and it became the quick and easy way of separating the freaks from the ones who just wanted to get laid in the usual way.

I suppose the only thing we could say in our defence was that *'ye* never actually forced anyone into a position that they didn't claim to be able to handle. The trouble was that many of these girls rushed in trying to make it so very clear that they were groovy rock and roll women who could take anything that we were ab[1]e to think up, but usually wound up freaking out. An extreme example of this was Sophie who showed up after a gig, came home with Jerry, but, unlike most, stayed for about four days instead of the usual one night.

Sophie was small and very pretty, she had thin, boyish hips, minute breasts and long dark hair. Her face had that kind of imbalance in favour of the mouth and eyes that Brigitte Bardot made the ideal for the fifties and a million other chicks have exploited clear through to the present day.

I didn't take much notice of her on the way back from the gig apart from being dimly aware that there was some little chick cuddled up with Jerry. I hadn't connected with anyone at the gig who seemed suitable to lug back to London for a night of thrills, and I climbed into the truck, dropped a couple of Seconal and crashed out.

The first thing I knew about Sophie was the next morning when I was woken up by a voice asking me if I wanted a cup of coffee.

I opened one eye, and saw this small attractive face, with huge brown eyes and full sensual lips, framed by dark brown hair. She was wrapped up in one of Jerry's bed sheets. I rolled over, and fumbled for a cigarette.

'Do I want what?'

'I was going to make some coffee, do you want some?'

My mouth tasted like a sewer and I had to think for a minute about the idea of putting hot coffee in it.

'Yeah, why not.'

She jumped up, looking pleased at having some task to perform. As she reached the door something suddenly struck me.

'Hey listen, who are you?'

'I'm Sophie, I came back with Jerry last night.'

Memories of the small clutching figure in the truck came dimly back.

'Is Jerry still in bed?'

'No, he went out earlier with what's-his-name, Connie, the drummer. They said they were going to score.'

I nodded, that meant they'd be out for most of the day. When we weren't working the same night, scoring could be quite a lengthy process.

Sophie slipped out the door, and I lit a cigarette. As usual I coughed for a few minutes as the first smoke of the day attacked my lungs. The fit of coughing forced me to sit up in

bed, and afterwards it seemed too much trouble to lie down again.

I glanced round the room feeling blank, and noticed that it was raining outside. As a reflex to that piece of information, I leaned over and switched off the electric fire. As I was watching the element turn from dirty grey to bright glowing orange, Sophie returned with two mugs of coffee, set them down, and then sat beside me on the bed.

'Your kitchen's in a terrible mess.'

'Yeah I know, nobody does much about it.'

She handed me my coffee.

'I could clear it up for you later.'

'That shows great domesticity.'

'I quite dig washing up.' I smiled.

'That's a taste none of us exactly share.'

I took a sip of coffee, burned my mouth, and put it back on the floor. She looked anxious.

'Don't you like the coffee?'

'It's a bit hot to drink yet.'

The conversation had reached one of those lapses that happen when people who don't know each other try to exchange bright remarks. I stared out of the window, and Sophie seemed content to wait for me to say something. Finally, unable to think of anything else, I threw a weak, sidelong leer.

'Did you have a good time with Jerry last night?'

She nodded enthusiastically.

'Fabulous. We got into this incredible whipping scene.'

'Jerry's like that.'

'It was weird, but I really dug it. Would you like to see the marks on my bottom?'

I'd met some weird chicks, but never one who was so eager and innocent about being debauched by rock musicians. Before I could answer, she'd jumped up and unwound her sheet, and swung round to reveal a mass of angry red stripes across her arse.

There's something quite erotic about being presented with a backside that someone else has been recently beating on, so early in the morning. I did my best to remain super cool.

'Do they still hurt?'

'Not really, they're a bit tender, but they don't actually hurt.'

She turned round.

'Do you have a long mirror?' I pointed.

'There's one in the wardrobe door.'

She skipped across the room and twisted about in front of the full length mirror, inspecting the marks on her butt.

'Proud of them?' She laughed.

'They're quite spectacular.'

She went on admiring herself, and the vision of this naked young woman cavorting round the room began to have what I suppose was the desired effect. I sipped my coffee and let her work at it for a couple of minutes, and then gave up trying to be aloof.

'Sophie.'

'Yeah?'

'Why don't you stop jumping around, and come over here?' She immediately climbed into the bed and snuggled up against me.

'I was afraid you didn't like me.' I stroked her hair.

'I think you're very nice. I can't get horny directly I wake up.,

We rolled about together for a while, kissing and fondling each other, then with almost professional expertise she slid down inside the bed and began busily licking and sucking.

I was still sleepy enough to be happy to lie back and let it happen, and there was still

enough speed running round in my bloodstream so that there was little chance of her bringing me off for a long time.

After a long while she surfaced and smiled coyly at me.

'Was that nice?' I stretched.

'Great.'

She rubbed herself against me.

'Maybe you'd like to whip me too?' I lifted my head.

'Huh?'

She let her eyelids droop, and peered at me from underneath them.

'I could go and get Jerry's whip from his room.'

I suppose at that point, my mind could have boggled. This weird little girl demanding to be beaten twice in
the same twenty-four hours was strange by any standards. But I suppose in order to be shocked, you have to have some kind of definite sense of normality to hold on to. Instead I just stroked her breast.

'Why don't you do that?'

She scrambled out of bed, and disappeared through the door. I lay there sliding into surrealism. It was either that, or trying to understand what Sophie was seeking to prove, and trekking through the swampy territory of her mind was something that I just wasn't ready for. The temptation to try and get inside her mind and find out exactly what she was experiencing in this bizarre situation was cut short by her coming back into the bedroom. In her hands she had the short riding crop that Jerry had bought in an Edinburgh antique shop, one day when we were playing there, and also a length of braided silk dressing gown cord. She stood at the end of the bed with a strange vacant expression on her face.

'I brought the whip.'

She seemed to love using the word.

'And I brought this...'

She held up the length of cord.

'...He used it to tie me up with.'

I sat up in bed. There was no more time to think, she had started her ritual.

'I don't think I'm going to tie you up. I'll trust you to keep still.'

I climbed out of bed, and stood beside her. She handed me the whip, and looked up at me with a fleeting expression of nervousness.

'Lou... I mean, you won't hurt me too much, will you? You won't hit me on the bottom? I don't think I could take that.'

I smiled at her.

'If I hurt you too much, tell me to stop. Kneel down.'
She knelt in front of me, and I brought the riding crop down across her back. A nasty excitement took hold of me, and I hit her a few more times. She moaned and arched her back. I struck her across her breasts and she gasped.

'Lou!'

I hit again in the same place.

'Please!'

Again.

'Please! Not my tits! It hurts too much!'

I paused, and then deliberately lashed out once more. She cried out and doubled over hugging her chest. I picked her up and laid her down on the bed. As I slid down on top of her she opened her eyes.
'You're more of an evil bastard than Jerry.'

We must have dozed off for a while, because the first thing I remember after balling Sophie

was waking up to find Jerry and Connie grinning down at us.

'Look at the cunt, in bed with my chick, cool as you like.'

I sat up in bed.

'She seduced me, guy, honest. I was a victim of her feminine wiles.'

Jerry picked up the riding crop from the floor, and grinned at me.

'Looks like it, doesn't it.'

The same evening Connie took Sophie off to bed with him, and then, the next day, we split to a gig in Newcastle. We returned to find that not only was she still there, but the entire pad was clean and shining, and she was installed in Jerry's bed, waiting to collect her reward.

After the trip to Newcastle we didn't wake up until late afternoon, and by the time we had dressed, been out for something to eat, and generally messed around, it was already too late to go out anywhere, so on the way back from the greasy spoon we clubbed together and bought a bottle of Scotch, took it home and settled down in front of the television.

After we'd each had a couple of Dex and half killed the bottle, Jerry began to get that perverse look which usually indicated he was about to come out with some piece of weirdness.

'This is no way for three healthy lads to spend the evening.'

Connie and I rolled over and looked at him.

'So, you got any bright ideas?'

Jerry pretended to think for a while, then he swung round on Sophie.

'Hey baby, you've had all of us one at a time, think you could have us all at once?'

Sophie looked up, she was in the first stages of drunkenness, and giggled.

'I don't know, I never engaged in that kind of thing before.' Connie and I laughed, and although Jerry joined in, he still had that twisted look about him. There was a pause while we all waited for him to make his next move in the outrage he had obviously already hatched somewhere in his mind. In the end were were rewarded for our patience. He stared for a long while at Sophie.

'Okay babe, strip off then.'

Sophie looked surprised.

'What?'

'Take your clothes off darlin', that is, if you want to join in our little game.'

Sophie's eyes got a couple of sizes bigger.

'What game?'

'We're going to play orgies, stupid, so get undressed and stop rabbiting.'

Sophie hesitated for a moment and then nervously started to tug her T-shirt out from her jeans.

She stood up to take off her jeans, and as she stepped out of them, Jerry reached over and gripped her leg.

'Okay, now you can undress us.'

He let go of her and lay back on the carpet as Sophie crouched down and began to unbutton his shirt.

Jerry sprawled naked on the carpet while Sophie undressed Connie and finally me. It was a strange sensation, sitting round in a brightly lit living room with two of your mates and a chick, with none of you wearing any clothes. I remember feeling a little sheepish, and wondering what exactly I should do next.

I needn't have worried, as it happened. Jerry seemed to have the whole situation worked out, and began busily stage managing everything.

The scene that followed became twisted by all the drugs in my head into a long weird montage of moving flesh. I have a few memory flashes that are very clear. I have an intensely

clear vision of Sophie on all fours with a mouthfull of Connie while Jerry balled her from behind, and another of lying on top of her humping while she played with Jerry and Connie who sat crosslegged on either side of us.

For the rest of the episode, the details are really blurred up until the point when Sophie put an end to things by leaping up with a kind of strangled moan and rushing into Connie's room, and not emerging until the next morning.

I was really surprised that she stuck around through the next day, particularly as it quickly became obvious that Jerry was determined to involve us all in even greater excesses.

When Jerry was in the middle of creating one of these perverse series of events, there was a constant air of suspense, and there was nothing the rest of us could do but wait for him to spring his next little treat.

In this case, it came soon after Sophie had returned from the chip shop with our lunch, and once again it was her he directed his attention towards.

'You didn't dig our little party last night then?' Sophie swallowed her mouthful of chips.

'I just got a bit freaked out, I'm sorry. I was really out of my head, and it all got a bit too much for me to take.'

Jerry shrugged.

'Don't worry about it. I was just thinking, we could have quite a wild time if we had some more chicks.'

Sophie looked relieved. I think she was afraid Jerry was going to demand a repeat performance. She smiled helpfully.

'Aren't there any you could call up?'

Jerry scratched his chin discontentedly.

'Sure, but calling up some chick ain't exactly an adventure. It's new bodies that's what we want'

Sophie looked piqued, she obviously took Jerry to mean that she was an old body.

'So why don't you go out and pull some birds?' Jerry shook his head.

'No, I was thinking more about how maybe you could go out and pull us some chicks.'

Sophie's eyebrows shot up.

'Me?'

'Why not?'

'You've got to be joking.'

'Why, all you got to do is go out and bring back two more girls. Think about it, it shouldn't be too hard.'

There was a long pause while Sophie sat looking at her feet.

Finally she looked up.

'What kind of girls do you want then?'

Jerry shrugged.

'I leave it to you, they ought to be better looking than you though.'

Sophie ignored the insult, and went to get her coat.

After Sophie had gone out of the door Connie and I both looked questioningly at Jerry.

'What the fuck do you think you're up to?'

'Having fun, what else? She'll either come back with two more birds, or she won't come back at all. It can only be interesting, one way or the other.'

Connie lay back in his chair.

'Can't argue with that, it's all down to giggles.' I couldn't help grinning.

'Giggles or sociology.'

We sat around smoking dope for about an hour, and then a feeling came on us that we

needed a few drinks, particularly if there was any likelihood of Sophie returning with two strange women. It took about twenty minutes of pressure to see who would go out for booze before Connie finally cracked, and stomped off to the off-licence.

He had only been back for about ten minutes, just long enough for us to have consumed maybe half of the first bottle, when the doorbell *rang*. I got up to answer it, and, to my surprise, there on the doorstep was Sophie, complete with two strange chicks.

Jerry looked up.

You did it then?'

Sophie nodded proudly.

'This is Paula, and this is Helen.'

We smiled and said hello. Jerry stood up and put on his most charming expression.

'I'm Jerry, this is Lou and that's Connie. Why don't you sit down and have some wine?'

The girls took off their coats and sat down. They had a friendly, open to offers look, although it was, understandably, tinged with a little nervousness at being confronted with a roomful of strange men.

Helen was small and dark, similar in many ways to Sophie, only her face was longer and her eyes and mouth were in proportion to the rest of her, which gave her a rather more mature air than Sophie, closer to, say, Joan Collins than Bardot. Paula, on the other hand, was quite the opposite type to Sophie and Helen. She was a bouncy blonde, with short curly hair and the kind of tits and arse figure that *Playboy* has adopted as its own.

Connie and I bypassed the first awkward moments by hustling about, getting the girls glasses, and Jerry started rolling a joint, then we settled down and passed it round. I noticed that both of the new girls took healthy hits on it with an air of both experience and enjoyment and didn't come out with any kind of lame 'oh-no-it-doesn't-do-anything-for-me' bullshit.

We had just begun to relax when Jerry suddenly sat up and looked at Sophie.

'Are these young ladies friends of yours, or did you just pick them up on the street?'

Sophie grinned.'

'We've met before.' Jerry leered.

'So you can vouch for them.' 'Oh sure.'

'That's good, you can't be too careful these days.'

Helen and Paula glanced at each other, made an obvious decision to make a joke of the exchange, and laughed, but a tension returned to the room, and I think that even they had become conscious that there was more going on than just a pleasant social afternoon of drugs and booze.

Jerry didn't erupt again for a while, and, in fact, turned on the television, and we sat around, getting stoned, watching the children's programmes and making idle conversation. I began to think that maybe the drugs and drink had mellowed out whatever warped scheme he was planning when he sent Sophie out.

As it began to get dark outside I forgot all about his pranks, and Connie and I began systematically moving in on Helen and Paula. By the time the first cop show came on the screen I was huddled cosily in a corner with Paula, while Connie and Helen had both moved into the same armchair and were idly stroking each other.

After about another half hour, Jerry and Sophie disappeared into his bedroom, and, locked into a tiny world of cushions, TV and necking with Paula, I forgot all about him until he noisily emerged from the bedroom. I was mildly surprised to see that he was still fully dressed.

Connie and I looked up as he stood in the doorway, obviously wanting our attention.

'Why don't you all come in here, I got something I'd like you to see. Particularly the girls.'

We disentangled ourselves and trooped into Jerry's room to see what he had to show us. As we went through the door Jerry pressed a finger to his lips, motioning us to keep quiet.

The room was almost dark, lit by one single candle, but dim as it was, Jerry's little set piece didn't lack impact. Sophie was spread-eagled on the big Victorian brass bed, fiat on her back with each wrist and ankle tied firmly to a corner post. She was completely naked and the marks of the beatings she'd had over the past few days were still very clear against her excessively white skin.

For a very long moment the four of us stood looking at her in dumb surprise, while Jerry watched us with an evil smirk. Sophie had her eyes tightly shut and didn't seem to be aware that we'd come into the room. Before any of us could speak, Jerry picked up his riding crop and struck Sophie a single vicious blow across her legs, just inches below where they joined pink flesh and her black triangle of hair.

She cried out, twisted her body, opened her eyes and as she became aware of the audience around the bed they grew larger and larger. There was a monstrous moment of silence. And then she blew up.

'You bastards, you fucking perverted cunts, untie me, untie me, bastards, or I scream the fucking place down. You're all crazy.'

Jerry broke up laughing but reluctantly started to undo the cords that held her down. Directly she was free she leaped up, grabbed her clothes and dashed past us and ran for the bathroom while Jerry sat on the bed, doubled up with laughter.

Connie, the girls and I went back to the living room in an awkward silence that was only broken by Jerry's laughter mingling surreally with canned guffaws from a TV comedy show. A few moments later, Sophie slammed out of the flat in tears.

The most amazing thing about the whole scene was that Paula and Helen didn't immediately put on their coats and split. and, although they were acting very coolly towards Jerry. by the time the TV finished I was in a position to lead Paula off to bed.

I didn't have either the heart or nerve to put her through any routines, and we did it absolutely straight, and after it was all over she surprised me by propping herself up on one elbow and looking at me thoughtfully.

'I probably wouldn't like it if it happened, but when I saw Sophie tied up like that, I felt really envious for a moment. I mean, there was something very exciting about being so totally exposed and helpless.'

We're roaring towards the end of *See She Gets Here Fast.* We usually stick pretty much to the way we do it on the album, and then put in a long instrumental passage at the end, where I get a chance to tuck myself away behind Connie and let Jerry and Mac take over the centre of attention for a while.

Standing in the space between the walls of speakers, it's a chance to relax for a few moments. Chas hands me a lit joint, I take a couple of hits and hand it back again. There's a bottle of hock in the ice tub already open, so I swallow a couple of mouthfuls and turn back to see how things are progressing on the stage. They are about halfway through the instrumental passages and Jerry is standing stiff legged, right up against the footlights, rocking on his heels, while Mac stands slightly back from him, hunched over his guitar. There are tiny flashes as the sequins on his shirt reflect the lights.

Just in front of me, Connie is drumming like a maniac, his thick bushy hair waving like a banner as he flails at the massed hardware of the double kit.

Before he, even went on stage his white makeup and dark eyeshadow was calculated to heighten his usual pinched look of being about to die, but with it streaked and partly washed away with sweat he now looks as though he is going to keel over at any moment. His eyes are tightly shut and his pointed face has that look of anguish that you see in photos of athletes crossing the tape after having set up a new world record for the mile.

It's ironical that despite his fragile appearance and massive drug consumption, Connie has more stamina than any of us, with the possible exception of Chas.

Almost to prove that very point, he starts to up the tension of the drumming. Jerry is rocking about in the front as though demented. The music begins to show the symptoms of being about to end. I emerge from behind the drums and after a minute or so Jerry spots me and begins to move back towards Connie so that they can exchange signals for the finish.

Jerry and Connie really make a meal of the ending, with a great deal of hammering and extended feedback. I jump around a bit to show willing, and then there's the final crash and I mince quickly up to the nearest mike.

'Okay! Okay!'

The prolonged roar is still coming from the crowd, and I do a little circle walk, away from the mike and back again, while Jerry bangs his guitar a couple of times. The cheering subsides, and is replaced by a chorus of random shouts.

It seems to be a good time to do the number of turning the spotlights on the audience, and I wave theatrically towards the projection box.

'Let's have some lights down here, and see what they look like.'

Two huge white spots blossom into life, and pan around the arena. As the circles of light cross each section of the crowd, a forest of arms is raised, like a sea anemone reaching for its dinner, waving hands, clenched fists and the odd two finger peace sign. The peace signs are by far the minority, though. Even at the height of flower power, we were never renowned for being a love and peace group.

'They don't look too bad, do they?'

Jerry is standing in front of his mike, shading his eyes and pretending to scan the audience. Connie comes out from behind the drums and joins him.

'I've seen worse.'

We're all standing at the front of the stage peering down into the audience, as the big spots move around. Every time one of us makes a remark, it's followed by a short cheer and a lot

of shouting. We let it build up for a while, and then it seems to be about time to go into the next song.

'This is something we've been playing for years. You'll probably know how it goes.'

The light crew kill the two spots and dim everything on the stage. Jerry wings into the opening of *Baby You Can't Stay Here.* It was our first hit, and there's a ragged cheer.

The introduction builds up in the darkness, and then they hit me with a blue spotlight, and I can feel the temperature go up straight away.

Come on darling, I think there's something you ought to know.
The night is over, and I really think you gotta go.

The song is slow with a kind of blues feel, and I can do the cracked moody voice a lot better now than back when we originally recorded it.

I didn't want to give you no hope
I didn't try to make you a joke.
Jerry cuts in with that riff that really made the song.
Baby you really can't stay here any more
That riff again, and then we go into the second verse. It's still me alone in the middle of the stage.
Don't please touch the curtains, that light is awful bright
Don't make too much noise, I'd like to spill pretend it's night
Maybe you better go along
Tell them that I done you wrong.
Oh baby you really can't stay here nay more.
Jerry plays the riff over and I drop my head, rolling it so it rests against my shoulder. One hand is on the mike while the other hangs loose. It's that hunched up, legs spread pose that goes all the way back to James Dean.

Jerry keeps on playing the rift while Mac zooms in over the top with some nifty slide guitar. The lights begin to come up all round me, and the rest of the lads emerge from the shadows. When the stage is fully lit I do a jive kind of walk over to where Mac is and stand very close to him, swaying in time to his solo.

As the guitar howls on, throwing wasteland images across the huge stage, Connie builds up the rhythm behind it until there's the flash stop, and then Mac and I sing the middle part into his mike, heads very close together in a faggy imitation of George and Paul. Jerry joins in from the other side of the stage.

Last night the words came easy
Like you read them from the card,
But now it's time for leaving,
Please don't make it...
Stop. Falsetto.
Hard.

Another stop, then Jerry leads us in through the original riff, and I'm back in the middle of the stage, waving a rhetorical arm at the audience, sneering into the third verse with the spread fingers of a hostile shaman.

Gather up all the things you think you'll need.
And don't look like that, I know you're much too cool to bleed.
Inside our velvet dream
There wasn't any future scheme.
And baby you really just can't stay here any more.

I suppose we would have followed Jerry deeper and deeper in the side corridors of weird sex, if two things hadn't happened to us almost simultaneously and very positively diverted us into new avenues. The first of these twin events was our having a hit record, and the second was the arrival of LSD.

We had all been somewhat disappointed by *Standing at the Side of the Road* not making it into the charts, even though Jimmy kept reporting that the sales were quite heathy.

A couple of months after *Standing* had been released, Jimmy summoned us up to the white room and after a long, rambling and often irrelevant meeting, it was decided that we ought to start thinking about another single.

We had the few tracks we'd done at those first sessions, but none of them seemed really suitable, and with the amount of time we spent on the road, our song writing had become almost nonexistent.

Jimmy sent us away with a strong impression that we ought to come up with something quite soon, and as a result, our brains became a total blank for the next week or so.

I tried putting down some lyrics, things that seemed suitable for the record buying boppers, but they all seemed lame and derivative. We examined the possibility of recording a shortened version of *Who Do You Love,* and then rejected it as being better for an album.

After these unsuccessful attempts to find ourselves a new single we avoided mentioning the problem and went around feeling uncomfortable, and hoping Jimmy wouldn't ask us how we were getting on.

Just when we were beginning to think that maybe we ought to do a cover version of a Bob Dylan song or something, it suddenly happened. We were sitting around at home one evening, just Jerry and I, Connie having gone to the movies or out with a bird. We were getting well stoned, and Jerry was fooling with his acoustic guitar while I lay on the floor reading a bunch of comics that someone had left lying about.

He seemed to be playing the same phrase over and over again, but I was far enough into Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., not to be paying much attention until he nudged me with his foot.

'Listen to this.'

I rolled on to my back.

'Listen to what?'

'This.'

He played this kind of two bar phrase, I looked blank.

'What is it?' He shrugged.

'Dunno, I just made it up.'

'Play it again.'

He played the phrase a couple more times, then put down his acoustic, picked up his Fender and turned on the little amp he kept it plugged into.

'Can you play some chords?'

'Maybe. I'll try.'

I picked up the acoustic and checked that we were in tune with each other.

'Play D and G. Like this.'

He demonstrated, and after a bit of fumbling I did what he wanted, while he played the riff over the top.

'How about that?'

I nodded.

'It's okay, it sounds sort of menacing. It needs some kind of melody line.'

Jerry played the chords again, adding new ones. On the third time round, he gradually began to hum the tune.

'How does that sound?'

'I really like it. It wants really strong lyrics.'

'Got any ideas?'

I shook my head.

'Not right at this moment, but keep on playing it.'

Jerry kept on strumming the chords and I hummed along with him.

It was only a short while after the scene with Sophie, and my mind began to work along the lines of throwing some chick out of the pad. I began to feel my way into some odd lines and couplets.

'I didn't want to give you no hope,

I wouldn't try to tell you no joke.'

'That doesn't quite fit.'

'Try shortening the third and fourth lines.'

I went to fetch a paper and pencil while Jerry worked out the new changes. For a while he picked at his guitar and scribbled furiously. Finally I had something like a rough first verse. I looked up.

'I think it should maybe go like this. The first teo lines the original length, the next two short and the final one long. Okay?'

'Okay.'

I nodded in time, Jerry played a short introduction, and I tried to sing it.

Come on darling, I think there's something you ought to know.

The night is over, and 1 really think you got to go.

Now the short lines,

I didn't want to give you no hope,

I didn't want to tell you no joke.

Hold the G!

Baby you really can't stay here any more.

We looked at each other, It was really starting to sound good.

'It's starting to sound all right.'

'Yeah, the fourth line's a bit weak.'

'It ain't too good.'

I thought for a moment.

'How about — I didn't try to make you a joke?'

'That's better.'

Jerry suddenly grinned.

'I think we've got the makings of a good song.'

The next day, we called up Steve and Mac and got them to come over and try out the song. After that we had to wait five days until we had some free time to book a hall and do a proper rehearsal with all the equipment. Two days of working on the song, and we felt confident enough to tell Jimmy that we were about ready to have a go at doing another single.

Although there was the usual paranoia about having to hold your baby up for public inspection, we were all very excited and pleased with the new song.

Even Connie, although he felt obliged to make his usual cracks about 'another fucking Dylan imitation', seemed to think that we had a real chance with the song.

The following week we had three straight days without any work, and Jimmy booked us into the studio for two six-hour sessions, which pave us more than enough time to lay down and mix *Baby You Can't Stay Here,* which is what the song ended up being called.

Jimmy had booked us into a different studio from the first time. It was one of the first of the really fashionable plush studios that started springing up to cater for rock and roll bands around that time. They all sported eight-track equipment, a Coke vending machine, a decor that made them look like the~ bar of an airport hotel with all the furniture moved out,, the oppressive air that soundproofing creates, and a lot of wires strewn about the floor.

Compared with the pokey little place in Denmark Street where we'd done our last recordings, this place was a veritable palace, and novelties like the adjustable mood lighting and the huge aquarium window through into the control room kept us amused for hours.

Jimmy seemed to get a lot more enthusiastic about these sessions, and he kept us at it, laying more and more tracks down. Tambourines, both electric and acoustic guitars, and even handclaps were overlaid on the basic guitars and drums, until by the end of the first session we had a heavy, if confused backing track.

The next day. we started on the vocals, and after a couple of run-throughs. I had a go at the lead part. Although I didn't make any mistakes, nobody seemed terribly keen on the way I'd done it. Immediately the take was finished, Jimmy's voice came over the talkback in my headphones.

'Lou, you'd better come in and listen to it.'

'Yeah?'

I unhooked the cans from around my ears, and walked into the control room.

'How was it?'

Connie looked up.

'Rotten.'

My confidence sank. I'd been quite pleased with the vocal, but there was always the problem I found in studios of working in a kind of hostile vacuum. It is very easy to sing in front of a big audience, you put out and receive so much energy that you have no time to be self-conscious, but in an empty studio, with only the band and a few of your mates, you feel so much on your own that it never really seems as though you're doing your best.

I nodded to Jimmy.

'Let's hear it then.'

The track started to run, and there was the usual shock of hearing my, own voice on a new song, it never came off the tape sounding the way I had imagined it. We listened in silence, and then, after it had run its three minutes, twenty seconds, we all sat and looked at each other. Before anyone else could weigh in with any criticism I thought I might as well forestall it.

'It ain't right, I'll have another go at it.'

Jerry looked up from staring at his feet.

'The main trouble is that you just don't sound like a geezer who wants to get some bird out of his pad.'

Connie joined in.

'He's right Lou, it's like you're just singing it. You've really got to act it up a bit more.'

Jimmy swung round from the board.

'Why don't you run through it a few more times before we try another take.'

I nodded and went back into the studio. There was a delay while the engineer wound back the tape and got the sound in my cans the way I wanted it. Then they sent the track through to me and I tried it again, but Jimmy stopped me after the first verse.

'It's not much different to last time Lou, Connie wants a word.'

Connie's voice came over the headphones.

‘Listen, can’t you make it sound a bit more kind of off-hand and callous?’

‘I’ll try.’

I could feel frustration starting to tighten at the back of my neck, then the track started and I began again. Again Jimmy stopped the track.

‘It’s not happening Lou. Do you want to take a break?’

‘No, I’ll try it again.’

Jerry’s voice came through to me.

‘Listen Lou, try to sound a bit more pissed off and bored, try and get your voice to crack a bit more.’

The frustration burst.

‘If you know so much about it, why the fuck don’t you do it yourself?’

There was silence over the headphones, then Connie and Jerry came out of the control room. Jerry handed me a joint, and I took a hit on it, feeling stupid after my outburst.

‘Okay, so what do we do?’ Connie shrugged.

‘Just smoke that, and ease back a bit. Try and think yourself into the atmosphere of the song.’

I took another hit on the joint, and as the smoke got through to me I could feel my temper ebbing away.

‘Okay, let’s try it again.’

I ran through the whole song again, and by the second verse I was starting to get into it.

‘I think we might try a take now.’

‘Sure Lou, it’s getting much better. Just try to sound a bit more bored.’

The track came through again, and I went through the song. At the end there was a pause. The talkback cut in.

‘Okay Lou, come and have a listen to it.’ I hurried into the control room. ‘How was that?’

Everyone looked a lot happier.

‘Sounded fine to me.’

‘Great.’

The playback started, and it became clear that I seemed to have got it right. By the time it was finished I was almost certain that it was the one. I glanced at Jimmy.

‘Think I should do another one?’

‘No, unless you really think you ought to.’ -I shook my head.

‘No, that’s okay by me.’

Jerry stood up.

‘All right then, let’s start on the harmonies.’

The next hour was spent by Jerry, Mac and Steve dubbing on the back-up vocals. Then Mac went out and topped off the whole thing with a bottleneck solo that was one of the best things I had ever heard him play. After that we had everything together to start on the mix.

Jimmy and the engineer started on the long process of balancing the sounds on the various tracks, and although we were able to give advice and make comments, we mainly had to leave it to Jimmy, because he knew so much more about the studio than we did.

It was amazing how he took all the extra tracks and laid them under the basic instruments and the vocals to produce that full, complex sound that had started with Phil Spector and reached its peak around this time, when R & B was nudging its way into psychedelia.

Once the single was finished, and we had chosen a twelve bar blues from the earlier sessions for the B-side, we again had to wait out the period between completion and release. It’s a very tense time when the produce is totally out of your hands and there is nothing more you can do about it. The paranoia begins of whether it is really good enough, of whether or not it will make it.

We went on working, trekking round the motorways of Harold Wilson's England in our increasingly dilapidated Ford transit, while Jimmy began working on the campaign to put the single into the charts.

The pre-release routine of music press interviews and photo sessions began, and then, just a couple of weeks before Christmas, it finally came out. It seemed a weird piece of logic on Jimmy's part, but after the festivities were over, we began to see the reason behind his thinking.

During the first two weeks in January, there was nothing being released, and the pirate radio stations were hard pressed to find very much new material. We had an enormous amount of airplay, far more than we could have expected at any other time.

I think Jimmy must have laid out a good deal of money, because we got excellent reviews, disc jockeys raving about it, and on Radio London it was given maximum exposure as a 'tip for the top'.

There was a very positive buzz during those first few days after Christmas.

It was the second Wednesday of the year, and it was pissing down with rain. I had woken up early, or, at least, comparatively early, and I managed to score some breakfast in the sandwich bar under the flat. After I'd eaten I hurried through the wet to the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, and scored an early copy of the *Melody Maker*.

It's hard to flip through a paper when you're walking along in the pouring rain, but, as I headed home, I decided to take a look at the charts, and turned back the corner of the folded paper.

I was quite prepared for the fact that our single wouldn't be in there, but I thought I ought to check it out. My fears were confirmed as I ran down the list, then suddenly, as I was beginning to get towards the bottom, there it was. At number twenty-eight it read, *Baby You Can't Stay Here* - Willy's Rats

- Presence.

It was unreal. There it was in print: Our single at number twenty-eight. No flags, no flashing lights, just lying there in small black print near the bottom of the chart. I stood in the rain in Oxford Street, grinning stupidly as the paper got soaked, started to turn transparent, and began to decompose.

As the fact that we had a hit record began to sink in, I knew I had to rush home and tell the others. I stepped off the curb, and was almost run down by a yellow newspaper truck. After that I took a little more care as I hurried back to the flat.

Connie and Jerry were. still in bed when I raced into the fiat. I roared into Jerry's room first.

'Wake up. Come on, wake up.'

Jerry opened his eyes and propped himself up on his elbow.

'What the fuck's going on?'

'We made the charts. We're in the *Melody Maker* at number twenty-eight.'

'What?'

He sat up in bed.

'You're not putting me on?'

'No really, here it is.'

I thrust the sodden paper under his nose.

'Jesus Christ! We actually made it. The bastards are going to have to take notice of us now.'

I left him struggling into his jeans, and hurried into Connie's room. Connie was half awake, and looked up blearily as I banged the door open.

'We're in the charts.'

‘You’re kidding?’

‘Number twenty-eight in the *Melody Maker.’*

‘Shit. You’d better give me a cigarette.’

Jerry stumbled through the door, scratching his head, and still clutching the damp copy of the *Melody Maker.*

‘There’s going to be some fucking changes going on now. You realize we’re about to be rock and roll stars.’

Connie started pulling on his clothes.

‘I don’t think I’ve really grasped it yet. I don’t feel any different.’

‘It’s like your birthday when you were a kid. You look forward to it for ages, and then when you wake up that particular morning, it feels just the same as any other.’

‘We’d better call Mac and Steve and tell them the news.’

Jerry went into the living room and picked up the phone.

‘It doesn’t sound like they’re in.’

‘That’s strange, it’s early for those two to be out and about.’ Jerry and Connie finished dressing, and I sat down in the living room and started rolling a joint. After a while, the other two joined me. Jerry put *Bringing It All Back Home* on the stereo, and with *Subterranean Homesick Blues* belting out we sat, smoked and wondered what we ought to do next.

A ring on the doorbell forestalled any plans being made, and when Connie opened the door a jubilant quartet of Steve, Mac, Jimmy and Eddie erupted into the flat.

‘You seen the music papers?’

‘Yeah. Great, isn’t it?’

Jimmy was rubbing his hands together.

‘It really seems like it’s all about to happen. You boys are going to be pretty busy over the next few weeks.’

Eddie had a couple of bottles of Moet in his arms, and we fell to popping the corks, spilling champagne over the carpet, passing them round and rolling more joints. The mutual congratulations went on and on until the bottles had died, and Jimmy finally took control of the situation.

‘What say we all go out and celebrate?’

Connie frowned.

‘We’ve got a fucking gig.’

‘Where?’

‘Reading.’

‘That’s okay, you don’t need to leave until about four. Let’s go out and have lunch somewhere expensive.’

On our next free night, Jimmy took us down to the Speakeasy, where we became loudly drunk, but with a big hit record nobody complained about us, and at about three-thirty we staggered home to bed with a bunch of high-class scrubbers in tow.

For the most part, however, having a record in the charts meant that we had about four times as much to do as we had had when we were an unknown band.

The music papers all wanted to interview us, and we did a couple of tapes of rap for the pirate stations. We did photo sessions, and of course still kept on doing all the gigs we’d been booked for long before the single had been released. It was absurd, playing these little clubs and small halls for the money we’d agreed to months earlier. The agency tried to extricate us from some of these, but usually the promoter stuck to the contract and we were forced to play to grossly overcrowded places, full of kids packing to see the new fave rave band.

The single jumped from twenty-eight to seventeen, and by the third week it was up to number twelve. As a mark of our rising status, Jimmy hired us a Ford Zephyr to ride to gigs

in, and we were freed from bumping down the motorway in the truck. Chas got a couple of helpers called Mike and Derek, we began to stay in much better hotels, and usually had much better chicks to keep us entertained after the gigs were over. Jimmy also began paying us all an extra ten quid a week.

Despite all these improvements in our conditions, we still spent the weeks after the single hit the charts racing around in a haze of speed, sleepers and booze, although, at least, we were able to drink champagne and good whisky instead of cheap rotgut wine.

The gigs, however, started to get really outrageous. We began to find that the smaller places were full before we even arrived, and we had to be increasingly careful not to drive the car slap into a crowd of kids hanging round on the street after being turned away from a packed club. After a gig in Sunderland where the car almost got rolled by a crowd outside the town hall, Jimmy got Eddie to drive us to gigs and cope with this kind of situation.

Things also started to get out of hand inside a lot of clubs, with mobs of kids trying to get on the stage or crash into the dressing room. This situation reached its peak at a scabby ballroom somewhere in Southampton when two chicks who for some reason had climbed on to the roof, suddenly plunged down into the packed dance floor after a section of corrugated iron collapsed under them. It was really uncanny seeing a hole appear in the roof and this leg appear, quickly to be followed by the rest of this young bird and her mate as well.

After a few of these incidents, the agency began to demand more and more safety requirements of the promoters, and blow out all of those who couldn't make them, which helped to weed out the really unsuitable gigs.

By the fourth week, we were at number seven, and really beginning to feel the strain. It was amazing that the music didn't suffer. Connie and Jerry both looked a mess, and I had lost about twenty pounds and had started to twitch a good deal. But despite all this, each time we walked on stage there seemed to be so much energy flying around we played better and better, and our charisma, authority, call it what you like, seemed to grow with every gig. It was as though we were all about eight foot tall and had the power to do exactly what we wanted.

We began to treat outsiders really badly, getting more obnoxious as things got bigger and bigger. I suppose it was the natural result of the unimaginable importance that people attach to rock and roll musicians. The group itself was a tight little unit with very few illusions about what kind of people we were, but outside that unit it began to seem that the rest of the human race was composed of total idiots, and there were precious few incidents that offered any kind of evidence to the contrary. The temptation was always there to insult them, send them up, and we did very little to resist it.

The pressure of work started becoming almost intolerable. It wasn't just the gigs, which we usually got off behind, it was the extra things like being dragged out of bed to pose for pictures for some fan magazine like *Rave* or *Fab,* and the film we made for Top of the Pops freezing our balls off, miming in the middle of Hampshire, trying to look mean and sardonic and appear to play our instruments. A howling gale sent clouds scudding across the sky in a nice, romantic, horror movie fashion, but it also served to freeze us all solid, and Mac and I had colds for days afterwards.

It was clear that things couldn't continue at the same pace indefinitely, and when Presence began hustling us to complete an album, we arranged with Jimmy that we were going to stop and do nothing for the whole of March except take it easy and record a bit. In April we'd do a properly set up tour of clubs and colleges and maybe do another single. Jimmy was quite agreeable, and on the last day of February we played the Marquee, and that was it for a whole month.

It was really strange, after two months of the most intense. brain-crushing activity, to have nothing to do. We had ten days completely free before Jimmy had our first session booked, and I spent the first two of them in bed, just lying on my back having simultaneous come downs off the various combinations of drugs I'd been swallowing.

On the third day I got up with my system cleaned out, but still feeling about eighty. I went over to Jimmy's office and scored some cash off Pat, and, since it was one of those bright blustery March days which give you a hint that maybe spring is coming after all, I decided to stroll about and do some shopping.

I took a cab to the King's Road and wandered down from the Sloane Square end, looking at the chicks, enjoying the sunshine and basking in the knowledge that I had nothing particular to do. It was like the first day up after a long illness, just walking, taking it easy and digging the contrast with the fear and twitching of the previous two months. I'd really been afraid, at times, that either my body would collapse or my brain would burst.

Halfway down I stopped for a beer and a pork pie in the Chelsea Potter. It was too early in the year for tourists, and the pub wasn't unduly crowded. Most of the people in there were full time Chelsea groovers, and although I'd hate to get really involved with their scenes and society, they were decorative and undemanding.

I downed the last of my beer and went on with my walk. I had heard that there was this little shop that had opened at World's End, so I wandered down the entire length of the trendy part of King's Road until I finally reached the demarkation between fashionable Chelsea and run-down Fulham. The shop had the weird name of Granny Takes a Trip, and
it was more than equal to the reports I'd heard about it. Both its decor and designs had moved a stage beyond the idea of swinging London, and I was sufficiently impressed to buy a suit made from the kind of striped material you find in old-fashioned mattresses, and a couple of shirts that were both variations on a sort of large, William Morris floral design. Well pleased with myself, I loaded my packages into a cab and headed back to the flat.

When I came in, weighed down with my purchases, Connie was alone in the flat, lying on the floor watching afternoon TV for the under fives. He looked at my bags and packages, and raised an eyebrow.

'We have Christmas twice this year?'

'I just bought some clothes.'

'The transition from dirty beatnik to successful pop star.'

'Maybe.'

I went through into the bedroom and dumped everything on the bed.

'Where's Jerry?'

'Dunno. Gone out.'

'Want to see what I scored?'

'Sure.'

We spent a quarter of an hour pawing through the stuff I had bought. Connie seemed to approve, but I wasn't sure how much value I should put on it, since he had as much taste in clothes as an aborigine who had just come in from the bush.

This all girls together session was broken up when the phone rang and Connie wandered off to answer it. About five minutes later he came back.

"Who was it?'

'Jimmy, he wanted to know, if we felt like going to some party tonight.'

'What kind of party?'

'I dunno, some old artist's place. I've got the address. I suppose he wants some musicians to give the whole thing class.'

'Do you want to go?'

'Yeah, maybe. There's nothing else to do. It'd give you a chance to wear your lovely new

gear.'

The party was much better than I expected. It was in an enormous rambling studio somewhere in the back of Notting Hill. The huge barn-like structure had two levels; the lower one had been cleared to make, by club standards, a reasonably large dance floor, while up a flight of stairs there was a kind of extended gallery where a lot of people were sprawled on cushions, drinking, chatting and smoking the odd joint.

A small PA had been set up on the dance floor, which was pumping out predictable rock like the early Stones and Beatles. From the edge of the gallery that overlooked the main floor, a few freaks were tending equipment that projected coloured lights, slides and some odd porny movies on the dancers and the far wall. The lights, and the way burning incense clashed with the usual turpentine smell of a studio, gave the whole event a kind of surreal, dreamlike quality that I found really fascinating.

There didn't seem to be any people that Connie and I knew, so we wandered around helping ourselves to booze and watching it all go on. Occasionally we would get involved in the odd conversation but for the most part we just drifted and remained detached. The people were freaks, that was for sure, yet they differed a good deal from the rock and roll weirdos that I was used to. Eventually I got bored with just looking around, and since I'd managed to find an unguarded bottle of Scotch that was still about a third full, I drifted towards a corner of the gallery and leaned against the wall, drinking on my own. I must have stayed there undisturbed for about fifteen minutes, until a voice beside me made me start.

'Looking for a quiet corner to jack off in?'

I swung round. It was a small, fat, bearded man, with a thick American accent. He wore dirty jeans and a stained T-shirt, and grinned up at me from behind thick glasses.

'So why are you leaning up against the wall like some kind of exotic delinquent?'

I offered him the bottle.

'Just standing here, drinking and thinking.'

He took a swallow from the bottle, and returned it. His glasses twinkled.

'Quotes Woody Guthrie too. How come you ain't socializing like the rest of the pack?'

'I don't really know any of the rest of the pack.'

'First encounter with the counter culture?'

'You could say that. I don't know a soul apart from the guy I came here with.'

'That's terrible. Are you homosexual?'

'Not this week.'

'Pity, but never mind. I'll turn you on to some of the people here. What do you do?'

'I'm a rock singer.'

'Really? I mean do you actually do it, or are you going to do it as soon as you can get it together?'

'We had, er, this single in the charts last month.'

'Really, how marvellous. What's your name?'

'Lou, Lou Francis.'

He shook my hand.

'Hello, I'm Norman. Let's go and meet some people.'

I followed him across the gallery where a group of people were passing a joint around. Three of them were pretty nondescript hippies, the fourth was a stout Truman Capote type approaching middle age, who seemed to have some kind of relationship with an extravagant voiced, actressy woman who sat next to him. The one that really caught my attention was a slight, pretty, Jewish-looking girl with small features and long black hair.

The six of them formed a complete circle on the floor, but when Norman and I walked up to them, they greeted him warmly and moved round to make room for us. Norman im-

mediately sat down and made himself at home, and I followed suit a little more cautiously. Without a pause, he broke straight into their conversation.

'Listen, I want you all to meet Lou, don't you think he's pretty, Lou's a rock and roll singer. He's actually had a hit record.'

They all looked at me as though I was the prize exhibit, and made noises to show that they were suitably impressed. The actress chick immediately started into some rap about how she thought the new rock groups were artists in the real sense. This led into an amazingly ill-informed discussion about the Who, Pete Townshend and finally destruction in art. I held out until I got the joint, and then stood up.

'I think I must go and look for a drink.'

The girl got up too.

'I'll come with you.'

I walked down the stairs into the main floor of the place with her following me. After we had negotiated two drunks who were arguing on the stairs, I smiled over my shoulder.

'Norman neglected to tell me your name.'

'It's Ruth.'

'That makes conversation a whole lot easier.'

'As long as you don't forget it. Most people here are so busy listening to themselves that they don't remember a thing you say to them.'

I made a deprecating gesture.

'You've got to remember I'm just a simple rock and roller.'

'Yeah sure.'

'Honest, lady.'

We shoved our way through the mob that was gathered around the long trestle table that held the booze, and I managed to get my hands on an almost full bottle of red wine. Ruth and I moved away from the crowd and climbed the stairs back up to the gallery, although I didn't make any effort to rejoin Norman and his friends and, instead, sat down in a fairly quiet corner. Ruth sat down with me. She took the bottle.

'You know, Norman's right. You are lovely.'

I took the bottle back from her, wondering how I was supposed to respond to that kind of remark. Before I could say anything, she went on.

'Are you one of his boy friends?'

'No, I only met him about five minutes ago.'

'Norman's very nice. It's weird though, he has this uncanny knack being able to pull the prettiest boys. I wish I could do as well.'

'He's not very decorative, I'm sure you ought to be able to do better.'

She smiled.

'Thanks for the compliment, but it is uncanny the way he does it.'

We sat in silence and drank for a while. It wasn't one of those uneasy lapses, however. I felt strangely comfortable sitting with this girl I hardly knew.

We finally finished the wine, and she started delving in her bag.

'Do you have a cigarette? I seem to have lost mine.'

I pulled a packet of Rothmans out of my pocket, gave her one and took one for myself. I lit her cigarette and after the first drag she exhaled with a sigh.

'I'm getting a bit tired of this place.'

'Do you want to get out of here?'

'Yeah, why not, unless you want to stay.'

'No way. I've got this mate hanging about but...'

I peered around, looking for Connie.

'…I can't seem to see him anywhere.'

'Shall we split then?'

I began to get up.

'Sure. Do you want to go to my place?'

She thought for a minute.

'No, let's go to mine. I'm tired of being dragged off to different guys' pads. I'd rather have all my things around me.'

Her pad was one of those low rooms with irregular sloping ceilings that you find on the top floors of West London terrace houses, what must have been the servants' quarters when they were the houses of huge Victorian families.

There was the usual excitement of anticipation, her legs flashed at eye level as I followed her up the stairs. Then we were inside her flat, and I began to see what she meant about having her things around her.

The smaller of the two rooms was a combination of a kitchen and bathroom, while the other was what I suppose you'd have to call a bed sitter, although it was so designed to be a complete sensory experience that the term no way did it justice.

The walls were hung with those big Indiacraft cotton bedspreads, all except a couple of sections of wall that were painted a kind of deep burgundy and covered with pictures from *Vogue* and the Sunday supplements, and those early psychedelic posters that had just begun to come into the country. The ones that advertised shows by bands like the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane, who at that time were little more than just names.

In one corner there was one of those big old Victorian china umbrella stands that held a huge display of pampas grass, peacock feathers and various other kinds of dried foliage, much of which had been liberally dosed with silver spray paint. The other corner was taken up by a double bed with a red velvet cover that was piled high with all shapes and sizes of cushions. Above the bed she had suspended an antique shawl, and its long fringes hung down, enclosing the space above the bed in a strange static waterfall of silk threads.

The remainder of the room brought it back from the Arabian Nights and closer to W.2 with shelves of books, a record player, a pile of albums and a gas fire that she lit immediately we were inside.

Once Ruth had scurried around, a couple of candles were casting soft shadows on the draperies, and the gas fire was popping comfortingly, the crowded little room seemed secure and inviting. I sat down on the bed and took my jacket off.

'Do you want some tea?'

The question jerked me back from looking around.

'Yes, I'd love some.'

Ruth went through into the kitchen, and there were sounds of a kettle being filled and put on a stove.

I flipped through the pile of albums and pulled out *Blonde on Blonde.* It seemed to fit with the room in a weird kind of way.

Ruth came back and sat down beside me while the kettle boiled.

'You like Dylan?'

I shrugged.

'He's become so much a part of life that it's got beyond likes and dislikes. His songs are so tied up with every part of the last few years that it's like he's just there. I guess he could become this generation's Bible.'

She nodded.

'I know what you mean.'

We sat and let *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* wash over us, then the kettle began to

whistle, and she jumped up to make the tea.

A couple of minutes later she came back and set a tray down in front of me.

'I'm glad you're not one of Norman's boy friends.'

'Yeah?'

'Do you know, I never thought to ask you the name of the group you were in. Is that a terrible blow to your ego?'

'No, it makes a pleasant change, really.'

'You'd better tell me though.'

'The band's called Willy's Rats.'

'Yeah? I've heard of them. Haven't you just had a hit record?'

'That's right.'

'Oh wow. I've got this friend who thinks you're quite interesting. She played me a record once, something about roads. She said you come on very sadistic when you're playing.'

I nodded.

'You could say that.'

She looked at me very seriously.

'Are you a sadist?'

I grinned.

'Not to the exclusion of every other kind of relationship. It's mainly a trip with the band. I guess we like to shock people.'

She put a hand on my arm.

'That's good. If you really wanted to hurt me, I suppose I'd have to let you, but I wouldn't like to get into one of those kind of scenes.'

I put my arm round her.

'Don't worry about it.'

She was so different from the chicks like Sophie that those games seemed totally out of place. I leaned over and kissed her cheek, and then her lips turned and met mine.

Very slowly and gently we undressed each other, and gradually lost ourselves in a quickening process that eventually grew into making love.

I think we must have lain naked on her bed for half the night, drowsily playing with each other, before we moved some of the cushions and climbed under the blankets to sleep.

The next morning started slowly. There was no pressing need to get up, and I lay under the blankets with Ruth, soaking up the warm and enjoying the feeling of delicious laziness.

About one she finally slid out from under the covers, and padded into the kitchen to make some tea. I sat up, lit a cigarette and coughed myself fully awake. Ruth came back with the tea and looked at my abject condition.

'You smoke too much, especially for a singer.'

'If I didn't, I'd probably eat sweets all the time and weigh twenty-seven stone. It's the pressure of modern living.'

'Come on. You just don't have the will power to give it up.,

'I don't even have the will power to try, also I bite my *fin*gernails, so what can I do?'

Ruth shrugged, and climbed back into bed.

'I don't want you to give up anything, I was just remarking on the state of you in the morning.'

'Horrid, huh?'

'Pretty unpleasant.'

We drank our tea in silence for a while, then Ruth put her cup on the floor and ran her fingers down my back.

'Do you have to do anything special today?'

'Not a thing. What would you like to do?'

Before she could answer, our morning fairyland was broken up by a jarring doorbell. Ruth jumped up and slipped into her dressing gown.

'Stay there, I'll go and see who it is.'

She disappeared out the door, and I crouched down under the blankets, hoping it would be the mailman, the meter reading or some other kind of thing that I wouldn't have to get involved with. My hopes didn't last long, however, because after a couple of minutes' pause I heard voices, the tramp of feet on the stairs, and the sound of Ruth laughing. I looked round, wondering what I'd done with my clothes, then the door opened and the room seemed to fill up with people.

Apart from Ruth, there were two guys and another chick, and I looked at them with the controlled hostility that is normal for strangers who confront you in someone else's bed. Ruth took no notice of my sullen expression, and brightly introduced everyone.

'Lou, this is Tim and Peter and that's my friend Rachel.'

They all said hello, and I sat up and responded with all the good grace I could muster. Rachel seemed pleasant enough, almost a blonde version of Ruth, but the two men didn't do much for me at all. They were the kind of limp long haired public school boys you find hanging round all over the rock and drugs scene, trying to come on like the Rolling Stones with all the right clothes and mannerisms, but lacking the kind of street corner energy it takes actually to do anything.

They settled down on Ruth's cushions and ignored me while she bustled about in the kitchen making three more cups of tea.

Once the hospitality ritual was over she settled herself cross-legged on the end of the bed and looked at them.

'So, what's going on?'

One of the boys, I think it was Tim, made the kind of languid gesture that sets my teeth on edge.

'We were thinking of dropping some acid and going to the park.'

At the mention of what was for me a new drug, my ears pricked up. Ruth looked round at me.

'Fancy doing that?'

I nodded.

'Sure, why not?'

I was determined not to let on in front of these two wimps that I'd never had any before. Ruth smiled happily.

'That's great. Although...'

She turned back to the others.

'...Lou and I really ought to get something to eat first, otherwise we'll just be tripping out on our empty stomachs.'

We found a cafe, and although Tim and Peter gave out with a lot of bullshit about pure food, Ruth, Rachel and I went inside, and they reluctantly followed. Despite all their half-arsed ideas, the two would-be hippies managed to put away as much sausage, egg, bacon and chips as either the girls or I.

As we ate the conversation drifted around to the subject of what exactly it was that we all did. It turned out that Ruth and Rachel both worked with some kind of theatre group, while the two boys came out with remarks like 'Digging life' and 'Getting into my head' which did little more than demonstrate that they had too many upper middle-class hangups to come out and own up to the fact that they were just hanging out and taking all the drugs they could get their hands on.

When they came out with their superior ‘Oh yes, and what do you do?’ they set themselves up for the putdown that I was really not that interested in administering.

‘I’m a rock musician.’

‘Far out, are you in a group?’

I could feel my ego expanding.

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘What are they called?’

Fuck you man, if you say you never heard of them it’s your loss, not mine.

‘Willy’s Rats.’

‘Willy’s Rats? Didn’t you just have a single in the charts?’

That’s right, motherfucker.

‘That’s right.’

They looked suitably impressed.

‘Far out.’

Rachel looked up from stirring her coffee.

‘Are you going to play at UFO?’

‘What’s UFO?’

I was losing points, although still well ahead. Ruth joined in with the explanation.

‘It’s a kind of club, there’s bands, and sounds. There’s also theatre groups and lightshows, all kinds of mixed media trips. It happens all night every Friday. You really should come.’

‘Yeah, I’d really dig to. I’ve been out on the road almost nonstop for the past two months. You miss out on a lot.’

Languid Peter decided to join in again.

‘Have you seen any of the new bands like the Floyd or the Soft Machine?’

I shook my head.

‘I haven’t seen another band for ages, what are they all about?’

The superior look came back again, but he was too far behind to come on too strong.

‘It’s really weird, they use light and feedback, and all kinds of electronics. It, like, simulates the acid experience. They’re becoming called the psychedelic bands. Do you know what I mean?’

‘I think so. I’d really like to see them.’ Ruth perked up again.

‘If you come down next Friday, you’ll be able to see the Floyd.’

‘Are you going?’

‘Probably.’

‘So why don’t you give me a ring beforehand and remind me?’

She smiled.

‘Sure.’

Tim looked at his watch.

‘We ought to make a move. There’s only about three hours of sunlight left.’

Ruth began to gather up her cigarettes and matches from the table.

‘Why don’t we...’

She looked round to see if anyone was listening to us, and lowered her voice.

‘...drop the acid, go to the park, and then, when it gets cold, we can go back to my place. Okay?’

‘Okay.’

We all nodded, and Peter produced a small, foil wrapped package, carefully unwrapped it, and with an absurdly furtive gesture slipped something into the palm of my hand. I opened my fingers and looked at the tiny orange tablet.

‘They’re sunshine, and very strong. I suggest you split that one with Ruth. Okay?’

I nodded.

'Sure.'

I put the minute tab into my mouth and bit off about half of it, carefully licked the crumbs off my front teeth, and gave what was left to Ruth. There was a strange air of finality. I'd taken this drug that people were beginning to make so much fuss about, and I was going to see what happened without any chance to quit if I didn't like it. I flashed on how maybe soldiers going into combat had the same feeling.

We got up, paid the bill, and walked out into the easy spring sunshine of the street. I was waiting for something to happen, but all around me it seemed like a normal spring day.

I became very conscious of my teeth, a slight jagged feeling of a kind of heightened sensitivity. I also started to find myself saying very little to the other four people as we walked under the almost bare branches of the huge trees on the Bayswater Road side of Kensington Gardens.

I was aware that something was coming on, but there was no mighty rush or anything. It seemed very mild, if this was the terrible LSD I really didn't know what all the fuss was about. I felt myself, feeling warm and good about everything, and I was about to catch up with Ruth and tell her how I felt when I remembered that if I did that, I'd give away the fact that this was the first time I'd taken any.

I immediately contracted, the jagged sensation of my scalp and teeth seemed to rush back. It was like my shoulders were trying to retreat into my body and constricting my chest. I trudged along behind the others, looking at the ground and saying nothing. I felt very alone. Alone and locked inside my own head, there seemed to be no way to communicate with the people up ahead. Alone, and totally by myself. I wished there was a way for human beings to open their skulls and touch brains with each other.

I looked around at the people in the park. They seemed untroubled by the isolation I'd discovered. The colours seemed to have become very intense. The green of the grass that I was walking on had become very hard and threatening, and I moved sideways, and then back on to the path. I ought to catch up with the others. If I didn't they might come back and look for me. I couldn't face talking to them. I couldn't find the words. Maybe I should tell Ruth bow I was... No that didn't seem to be right... I'd only screwed her... She might not want to know about them . . . Then what could I do? . . . I could go back to the pad…Jerry? Connie?…What would they do?… I couldn't say the first sentence to anyone... I couldn't start talking… I..I…wasn't able to…couldn't…I…

There was a marble fountain, white balustrades and stone flagstones that stretched off in moving lines of perspective. A piece of information slotted into my mind. Zit. You are by the fountains. The ones by Lancaster Gate station. And the water cascaded downwards, while particles of colour moved up them twining into the falling water, like in a dance that slipped off the side in arching drifting auras of colour, while the light, the light that came to the waterfall straight and majestic formed itself into infinitely slow explosions, unfurling like the galaxy giving birth to itself in a cold inexorable process of simultaneous opening and shutting.

It was beautiful.

Jesus Christ it was beautiful.

The sky was above me undulating, convulsing, twisting like a continuous rolling billow, think, twisting back upon itself in a thousand continuous Möbius movements, all interlocking so that their movements synched on and on, up from the surface of the planet, turning and spiralling in every direction to touch other objects, the space itself that they swam in, and even then, the small motions were only parts of a single large, motion That itself interlocked with... and that, in fact, was only…but…it was a too big…. each motion… each

series…was… so…much…so…vast…I couldn't grasp the concepts that were rushing into my…I couldn't… except…
but…they kept on coming and I was being spread so far across the whole fucking universe…pushing out of my head into ideas that if…the spiral went on turning my brain would unfold and blossom…but in that blossoming turn in on …and...but...

The planet was so fucking small ... and I was so fucking small that I couldn't conceive that it was even curved.

'Got a light?'

I screeched to a halt without even moving, everything decelerated so hard that I was crushed into myself, and every alarm system went off at once. Jangling and flashing. I looked round in panic. A figure was standing beside me, a face that twitched and squirmed, the brown face wrinkling and stretching, being pulled across the skull, the tension revealing the hideous thing that lurked under the skin.

'Have you got a light?'

I dragged all the bits into place, all the years of responding to other humans. It took too long, I could see the face distorting into a look of suspicion. I tried harder.

'Uh .. . no.'

I was lying, I had my fags and matches in my pocket, but it was complicated to get them out. The figure shrugged.

'Thanks.'

It moved away, and I watched it go. I remembered my cigarettes, put my hand in my pocket, took one out, found my matches and lit it. It was so easy, I must have done it so many thousands of times, the instructions were firmly implanted on brain and muscles.

The smoke filled my mouth, throat and lungs; it was harsh, abrasive and foreign. I wished I had some dope, dope would be so much better. The nicotine was putting my head together, but dope would have done it so much more kindly, and arranged me differently. There seemed to be a lull in the storm of sensations, and I looked around for the others. I didn't want to lose them. I saw Ruth standing by the balustrade, staring out across the Serpentine. I walked towards her, and as I came closer, she in turn began to come towards me.
I stopped, the problem of what I was going to say rushed in again. I didn't know how I was going to do it. There was so much I had to tell her, so much I had to say. I needed to talk to her so much. I needed contact with someone. I needed but ... I couldn't ... I... She was up close to me, her face moved, but the tensions were a whole lot softer than the stranger's had been. She... I

'Are you okay, Lou?'

Again the panic. The expanding fear that throbbed through whole...

'I, uh, yes.'

She smiled, but how could I lay on her I was expanding, but having to stop the process, I wanted to take in my ... but she was already ... away ... inside her own thoughts ... not thinking of me ... nobody ... the spiral sank down and down

in the harsh green and blue ... moving ... swirling ... the sun had gone ... and ... nothing ... nobody ... I was nothing.. . nobody . . . down. . . down and around. . . dark lines flickered over the paving stones, running a jagged, irregular race... shifting and peeling in layers of tattered colour.., and the spiral was still going down . . . I couldn't hold the visual long enough ... alone ... probing ... down ... down round ... down ... if I was dying who'd take the time to there wasn't ... nothing ... at the bottom ... death ... the unfolding and closing ... the other side of the shape ... only in the case of ... death ... you couldn't ... nobody nothing ... round ... down ... death ... nothing ... nobody…round... down.

I started walking across the flickering grass, a dark fire haunted the trees, and the frozen field ... go somewhere anywhere ... don't attract attention ... don't freak ... they mustn't notice

me ... get away ... find Ruth ... get away down ... attract attention and you'll get picked up ... and unthinkable flash of hospital corridor ... police uniforms busted in the back seat of a car that ... reject ... smells of leather... reject ... police station ... faded paint.., soap and cabbage ... reject ... now then ... reject ... round down reject... reject... down... reject... reject... REJECT.

Hurry…find something to do…do…don't think… do eat…I realize I've been looking at the park cafeteria..it'll close soon…it's nearly empty and maybe if I go inside and ... I start walking... shining chrome steel rails that could rip you apart if they got loose and coloured things laid out all in a fucking row. I stand and stare, can I really get behind anything...

'Do you want something, dear?'

I've got to do it now. I've got to pick up something now, and I've got to pay for it, I look round... not directed at me but audible.

'Watch him Glad, I think he's going to nick something.'

Out!

Out! Out! Out! Out!

Out! Out! Out! Out!

Out! Out! Out of the cafeteria!

Out! Out of the park out!

Out! Out! Out!

Along the street, dodging cars, making haste, scuttle, keep your head down, stay in your night time, going home number, *and where the fuck was home anyway?*

And suddenly there I am on Ruth's doorstep ... with one bound was free ... class 'A' dubious Saturday cinema serial solution ... to the cliffhanger...

Shall I press the bell?

Pause.

Comes sweet and clear — if you don't someone'!! call the cops — like moonlight through the pines, and I lean on the bell until the thought of them freaking upstairs jerks me off it maybe I've still got time to get away…but... the door opens and...

'Ruth!'

'Lou ... I ... where you been?'

'I...'

'Come in.'

'I...'

'Lou.'

Her arms go round me. I start to get warm.

'I was so fucking cold.'

'It's okay.'

'Jesus.'

She is enveloping me. It's hard up against ... but I can't... I can't ... I'm going to .. . but.. . if

'I can't. .

'Come along . . . upstairs.'

Walking up her stairs, getting closer, to . .. pause... stop on the landing ... jerky and finger-popping tense...

'Listen ... I ... like I mean ... are there ... are they who's with you ... I ...'

'There's only Rachel. The other two went.'

Relief ... sag against the wall… again she puts an arm round me.

'Come on, you'll be okay.'

I was over the top.

Roll me up and take me away, there was nothing else they could throw at me.

I'd cried, while Ruth held and stroked me, and when I started to talk it rolled and flowed

out of me, at first pathetic, about how cold and frightened I'd been, and then later it had become funny, stretching and reaching out for words to reach the peaks of disjointed laughter that Father Bruce had laid out just of meth and muscle relaxant, and collapsing with the girls into fits of helpless laughter.

I felt warm, I expanded, and the shadowed corners of Ruth's room flowed and shimmered with the colours of a Rembrandt. The conversation began to fade, and the layers and layers of the Beatles' *Revolver* began to take up our attention. There was so much I had never heard before that I found I would be following one instrument, and then change direction and begin to run with another. I had never been all that taken with the Beatles, but in the interweaving complexity of *Tomorrow Never Knows* I became immeshed, right inside the music itself. It was closer than I'd even really been to the thing in rock and roll. It wasn't that *Tomorrow Never Knows* was what I wanted to produce, it was that the way I was relating to Lennon was the way I wanted people to relate to me.

Also it told and sounded all about the jagged paranoia I lived through a few hours earlier.

It is knowing

It is knowing

I shook my head as the music piled on top of itself again and again. It wasn't what I wanted to do, but there was something that I wanted to know about. It was very odd, I knew that if a band could grasp the thing that could trigger people it was the key to some amazing power. Power to put people back together, to bring back the old gods, power to drive them into the streets, laughing, shouting, rejoicing. Somewhere in rock and roll music I just knew there was that power to smash into the broken minds of the lonely frightened people on this dying planet.

It was there, but was I the one to seize that power and use it? I had a sideways lurching flash that knocked me towards the afternoon in the park, a flash of this grotesque figure with its thin body and flaying stick-like arms, a mass of curly hair hanging down to its collar, sunken cheeks and absurd, oversized eyes surrounded by ugly dark rings, an effeminate face but only by the standards of a witch.

The horror of the flash was in the realization that this creature was me. I sat rigid on the bed staring straight in front of me. It was hideous that I should be such a thing, a grotesque parody of everything I had believed that I was. It was unthinkable.

Of the beginning

0/the beginning

Of the beginning

The record faded and finished, and I still stared in front of me, appalled at the vision inside my head. Then the leader of another record hissed out of the speakers.

You got a lot of nerve

To say you are my friend.

I could feel the arrogance of Dylan lifting me up and up, the stabbing accusations of the song filling me with strength.

You just want to be on the side that's winning.

My brain began to crowd with images, all just as grotesque as the first one. The whole fucking planet was crawling with them, squirming in lines and piles. The human race was no great big deal, a bit above the chimps maybe, but nothing to be afraid of.

You have no faith to lose and you know it.

They were all the same, and there was no reason why I should grab the power of music and beat down their walls, and open their minds and bodies.

I wish for just one time you could stand inside my shoes

You'd know what a drag it is to see you.

Fuck them, they were my species. I was one of them, we were all as pathetic as one

another. We might as well relate to each other. We might as well love each other. Nothing else was that important.

I suddenly laughed, and Ruth looked up and smiled.

'How do you feel now?'

'Great, I think I've got it all together.'

She slid across the floor and hugged my leg.

'I love you Lou. I feel really so full of love.'

Rachel was attracted by our conversation, looked up and smiled, and then went back to staring at the picture book she had in her lap. I stroked Ruth's shoulder, drawing curling patterns on her shoulder.

'I guess I love you too.'

I had grave doubts about that statement, but went on anyway. 'I don't really know what I mean by that. I don't know what to expect from being loved by anyone. I'm afraid I'll probably let you down.'

Ruth smiled and shook her head.

'Don't think about love as though it was always in the future. I love you now, I can't even conceive tomorrow, there's only now.'

She turned towards Rachel.

'I love Rachel too.'

I was beginning to hear a vague voice, part cynical, but part wanting to believe, that seemed to be a counterpoint to the aggressive, break on through. Only the walls of the city had been shaken and breached, maybe the love she was talking about was the end product that I was going to open people out to. I couldn't tell, maybe love can't be achieved by breaking people down so it is the only thing left, or maybe that was what acid, rock and roll, the whole thing was about.

My body was starting to take more and more of the functions of my brain. My tracing fingertips and Ruth's stroking hands were an electric, velvet sensation. Now we were through almost all the acid, I badly wanted to turn off my brain and spend the last few hours of the drug in a soft flesh world of sensuality. The only problem was that of Rachel. Would it bum her out if we started balling? Would Ruth want to ball in front of her friend? It was obvious that we couldn't expect her to leave. I badly wanted her, yet it all seemed so hard, and I really couldn't shrug off the need with some kind of can't win-'em-all platitude.

In a flash that was so obvious and said so much about the state of isolation I realized that all I had to do was tell the truth, just ask them.

I hesitated, once again it was so very difficult to start. I took a deep breath. I couldn't attack anyone's conditioning if I couldn't even make an attempt at my own. I took it very slowly and evenly.

'Ruth, listen.'

She looked up at me. Her face was so soft and gently tired.

'Yeah?'

'I've got this problem, my love, I'd really dig to ball you, but I don't know...'

I glanced at Rachel.

'...what I mean is, I don't want to lay any trips on Rachel. I really don't know how she would feel about it, or you for that matter. I mean, I really want her to stay here with us.'

I paused, I really didn't want it to seem as though I was trying to give Rachel the elbow.

'I also really want to ball with you, but I don't want to set up a scene where Rachel will be on her own.'

Rachel turned to face us, she looked very solemn.

'How would you feel about balling me?'

'I'd like to very much.'

‘Then why don’t we all make love together?’

‘I don’t want to feel I’m hustling you into an orgy.’

Rachel smiled.

‘So what’s wrong with orgies?’

Ruth stood up.

‘Why don’t we all just take our clothes off right now, then we can let our bodies come alive.’

She glanced at me.

‘You let your head take up too much of your time.’

There doesn’t seem to be a graceful way to take your clothes off. But the two girls seemed to manage it in a way that was sensual without any of the stripper phony erotic wiggles. Even my own body, normally white, hairy and joyless, looked a living gold in the candlelight, while Ruth and Rachel seemed positively to glow.

It was an indescribable experience, so far removed from the strange scenes back at the pad we’d had with Sophie. The tactile experience and the slow excitement that gradually built up between us defied the usual words with which we talk about sex. The detachment that is demanded of the participants in pornography, and for the symbols of aggression that usually pass for the language of sensuality, seemed to have nothing to do with us.

We sat together at first, touching each other with our fingers. I suppose it might have been the crosslegged positions, but the whole situation had a strange religious air to. it. The soft stroking and fondling gradually built in intensity, until Ruth suddenly threw her arms around my neck and we collapsed back on the floor, moving slowly together while Rachel sat beside us running her hands over both our bodies.

There seemed to be no solidity to us, we lay together, flowing rolling sinuous going through and round each other, until, like drums through feedback, the urgency became more and more focused and precise, growing and growing until it found a reciprocal rhythm coming up to meet it. It went on and on until I thought I could stand it no more, but, thinking I couldn’t go any higher, I found myself going higher still, until at last the universe seemed to fill my head, surge down into my body, and explode outwards.

I lay feeling limp and drained, watching vestigial colours float across the inside of my eyelids. Finally I opened my eyes and saw Ruth and Rachel kissing, very close to my face. I went through a moment of surprise, but then flowed into the feeling that it seemed right, and I ran my hands over their bodies as the two girls moved together in their love-making. It was so different from the sex act between a man and a woman that I watched fascinated as their action became more and more intense.

After a period of being the third party helper in the girls’ own scene, I began to become aroused again. As the girls’ scene became slower and more languorous, I started getting involved, and a situation evolved where Ruth and I both directed our attentions towards Rachel, working on her with our hands and mouths until she threw back her arms and was writhing and moaning on the cushions. Then Ruth helped me to enter her, and Rachel and I clutched at Ruth, and she clutched at us.

I eventually slept that night between the two girls, and woke in the morning feeling like some kind of Arab prince. I had breakfast cooked for me, and after lazing, around for a while I began to get a bit twitchy about how I maybe ought to go back to the flat and check out what was happening.

I gave Ruth my number, promised I’d go and have a look at the UFO club, and kissed her. I then kissed Rachel and let myself out of the flat.

As I hit the street, back again in the contained, straight world, I had a brief flashback from the incredible world of the night before, and slipped sideways in a kind of horror at the

terrible contrast, then the image started to fade and I hunted down a taxi.

'So where the fuck have you been for two days?'

Jerry was sitting in front of the electric fire, drying his hair. Connie came out of his bedroom in jeans and T-shirt, beyond him through the door I could see a blond girl sitting up in bed. He leaned against the back of Jerry's chair scratching himself.

'Have a good time, did you?'

I flopped into the other armchair.

'You wouldn't believe it.'

He grinned.

'You been with that bird you split with all this time?'

'Yeah, but how did you know I split with a bird? I looked around for you, but couldn't see you anywhere.'

'I had something going in a corner, so I wasn't about to leap up and bid you a fond farewell. You seemed to be taking care of yourself.'

I grinned.

'Maybe. You did all right though?'

'She was beautiful but pig stupid, Italian, worked in a boutique. Her English was pretty abominable but she had a whole load of Mandrax with her so it didn't really matter too much. She could half move it around though.'

I lowered my voice and jerked a thumb towards the bedroom.

'Is that her, still here?'

'Oh lord, no. I found that one in the Speakeasy last night.'

'You been busy then?'

'Gotta get some exercise while we ain't working.'

Jerry interrupted.

'All this chat about Connie's boring birds is just getting away from the subject of where you've been for the past two days.'

Connie interjected a phony Northern accent.

'Ee we bin so worried lad, yer mother wanted to ring the police.'

Jerry joined the game.

'Aye lad, yer dinner's quite spoiled.'

I laughed.

'It's been pretty weird. I mean I went back with this chick Ruth...'

'Ruth, aye.'

'He remembers her name.'

'No, leave it out, either let me tell you or...'

'Go on then.'

'Okay then. Well, I went back to her place and we had a scene, and then in the morning these two sort of public school hippies show up and lay this acid on us...'

'Acid!'

'Acid.'

'You've had some then.'

'Yeah, we all trooped off to the park straight after we'd downed it.'

'Lucky bastard.'

'What was it like?'

'Amazing, man, at first I had a lot of trouble handling it. I got so fucking paranoid and frightened.'

'Frightened?'

'Yeah man, you get these flashes of what you're really like. I mean, being confronted with

yourself, like really stripped of everything, it's pretty scary.'

'I can vouch for the sight of you being a fearsome-thing.'

'No seriously man, there really were some incredible things going on in my head. I got so many things sussed out, and fucking beautiful hallucinations, shapes and colours. There just aren't the words.'

'You sound like you've got religion.'

'Kind of, you really got to try some. It's so much more than any drug I've ever done. I mean, you know, I just can't joke about it. I can't really explain it, it was just so intense and heavy.'

'So when do we get some?'

'Dunno, I'm going to this club on Friday with Ruth. Maybe we could get some then.'

'What club?'

'This place called UFO.'

'UFO?'

'Yeah, it's a kind of happening, mixed media thing with bands and lights and stuff.'

'What, like the party?'

'Kind of, only Ruth said it's a whole lot better.'

'I kind of got off behind that stuff. I've been thinking that maybe we should get into some of that.'

'So why don't we go down there team handed, the whole band? Steve and Mac could do with an outing.'

UFO was something else. By the end of the evening our heads were so full of ideas that it was like they were about to burst. On top of the acid, a whole lot of things began to fall into place.

I had called Ruth early on the Friday afternoon, and ***ar***ranged that we'd meet her round at our pad later in the evening.

Mac and Steve came round at about eight, and Ruth, Rachel and also an American girl called Gloria showed up about half an hour later. Jerry and Connie appeared to view Ruth with a certain amount of curiosity, mingled with respect which I think stemmed from the fact that they'd wheedled out of me the story of the night I'd spent with her and Rachel on acid, and also that I let them know that 1 felt a lot more for her than I did for the usual scrubber.

With eight of us all sitting round, the living room looked fairly crowded as we passed round joints and watched some cop show on television. Steve and Mac, whom I hadn't seen for over a week, seemed in good spirits and we all began discussing what we were going to do when we went into the studio after the weekend. Although we did need to talk about it, I had a suspicion that Mac brought up the subject partly to impress the girls. Although all this shop talk left them rather excluded, they did seem reasonably happy to be right there in the wonderful world of high-powered showbiz.

When the band business started to flag Jerry nudged me.

'Do you think she brought the acid?'

'Dunno, I'll ask her.'

I turned to Ruth.

'Did you manage to get hold of any acid?'

She nodded.

'Yeah, I got you ten tabs.'

'Far out, how much do I owe you?'

'Just give me a flyer, that'll be cool.'

'You sure?'

'Quite sure.'

Jerry tugged his wallet out of his boot and leaned across me to pass Ruth a five-pound note, while I looked at the acid. It was the same sunshine that I had taken. I looked round at the others.

'Are you reckoning on having some, of this tonight?'

There was a pause while they all waited to see what someone else would do. Finally Connie shook his head.

'I'd rather just go down stoned on dope and see what the thing's all about. I think I'll probably do some of the acid tomorrow.'

Mac nodded in agreement.

'Yeah, a new club and a new drug's too much for one night. I reckon we all ought to get together tomorrow and take acid together. Like the whole band, and maybe some chicks. What do you think, Steve?'

Steve looked up from studying his boots.

'Sounds all right to me.'

I looked at Jerry.

'You want to do that, man?'

Jerry shrugged.

'Sure, I can get behind a-group drug binge over the weekend. Why not?'

We went on smoking dope and rapping to the accompaniment of the telly until the Epilogue came on. At the mention of religion, Jerry leaped out of his chair and switched the set off.

'Bastard Christians, how come they get so much fucking air-time? Listen, are we going to this place or aren't we?'

Mac dropped the copy of *Playboy* he'd been flicking through.

'Sure, I thought that was the whole purpose of the exercise.'

With the painful slowness of the very stoned, we gathered our shit together and made ready to go out. It was about ten minutes' walk to the place in Tottenham Court Road where they held the club, and, of course, with all the delays and stumbling about that went on, it took us nearer twenty.

At first sight the whole thing looked really weird. A huge sign that read Blarney Club was disorientating until I found out that for the rest of the week the place was run as an Irish immigrant dance hail. A wide flight of stairs with vestigial remains of thirties opulence led down off the street to the basement club. At the bottom of the stairs some heavy-looking freaks were taking tickets. We paid, and went inside.

Immediately you stepped through the door, the assault on your senses was so intense as to be almost physical. There was an overpowering smell of incense, a swirl of lights, both direct and from projections that floated across screens in various corners of the room. A PA system played continuous rock records, intercut with random sounds, snatches of disjointed conversation, and electronic music that created the impression of John Cage let loose to run a discotheque. On a far wall what appeared to be a D. W. Griffiths epic ran silently with a group of freaks sitting watching it intently, others just lay in corners and against the walls. Some danced in a curious leaping motion that reminded me of the way the ravers had danced during the trad craze that swept the country when I was first at college, but for the most part the audience milled around in a constant procession that contained some of the weirdest people I'd ever seen.

The commercial flower power thing hadn't quite struck then, and although there was a sprinkling of prototype kaftans and the kind of King's Road avant garde that I had on, most of the people were thrown back on their own resources and originality to create whatever effects they could by combining army surplus, Indiacraft and their grandmother's wardrobe. A girl came past, naked to the waist, wearing only blue-jeans, but with her heavy breasts painted in amateurishly enthusiastic swirls of dayglo paint that burst into phosphorescent life

every time she passed one of the black light strips on the wall.

A guy with almost waist length blond hair and a beard walked past in some kind of Middle Eastern robe that, apart from mirrored shades, made him look like the kind of Jesus figure so cherished by Victorian romantics. I found out later that he was one of the key acid dealers of the time, and that he took his religion very seriously.

I imagine if a time warp had transported a man from the fourteenth century into this dark cave of light and sound, it would have fulfilled most of his expectations of what hell would be like, but as I drifted around in the bizarre throng I found it a paradise, crammed with the seeds of so many ideas that made me realize that the things we had talked about doing with the band hardly scratched the surface of what was possible.

The focal point of the club was a small stage, more suited to Irish jig bands than rock and roll. A screen had been drawn across the front of the stage, and an underground movie was being shown on it, but it couldn't disguise movements of roadies going to and fro, and the electronic grunts of amps being tested. A ripple went round the club that the Pink Floyd were about to come on, and the audience began to gravitate towards the stage, the ones in front packing themselves cross-legged while those further back were standing and watching intently.

Flashes of light briefly illuminated the back of the screen, then the movie was halted, and without any kind of announcement a stage hand whipped back the curtain, and this amazing roar hit us.

Red and green lights flashed with nervous speed on the four-piece band, destroying and distorting their features as they played their unique music which seemed to have taken Chuck Berry on a round trip through deep space and brought it back changed almost beyond recognition. The organ and the feedback guitar soared and dipped like the unfolding of a spiral nebula, while the bass and drums reminded us that the music was still rooted in rock and roll, even though it became intertwined with the pulse of a quasar.

Caught in the lights, the band seemed to be aloof, remote, like sinister emissaries from a distant and powerful galactic empire. They were so far into their thing that for a band without any records and with only minority following, they were really impressive. I could see their trip, with its coldness and austerity, had little to do with what our band was about, and yet I could see that there was something about their cosmic roar that fitted us well, and in some half-formed way I could see myself riding it like a demented Silver Surfer screaming abuse at twentieth-century civilization.

We split from the club at about four o'clock, and as we walked back to the pad, it emerged that they'd all been as impressed as I had with the whole thing. Connie particularly seemed to be filled with ideas, although his, too, were still only half formed.

We talked until well past the dawn, and then Mac, Steve and the American chick Gloria all split, and we finally went to bed.

On Saturday afternoon, the whole band again got together and dropped acid, and by the middle of the evening the five of us, the girls and a couple of other odd freaks who had dropped round during the course of things, were involved in a full scale psychedelic party.

My experience earlier in the week had given me a whole bunch of pointers on how to avoid the wrenching spiral of paranoia, and every time I realized I was slipping into it, I found I could dodge sideways into something else.

There didn't seem to be any real freakouts, apart from one time when Jerry started to get a bit weird and shut himself in the bedroom for a while claiming that he couldn't take it all. Ruth went in to see if he was all right, and after about fifteen minutes they emerged laughing and grinning.

I spent a lot of time walking from room to room, watching everything mill around me. The

stereo was going full blast, and every time I went to change a record, Steve was lying beside it with his ear pressed to the speaker. He apparently spent the whole night in the same position, accepting joints and drinks when they were handed to him and occasionally muttering 'fucking far out' when anyone asked him bow he was.

Connie, on the other hand, seemed to have a complete thing going with Rachel, and the two of them spent most of the evening having one of those interminable transcendental raps that come out on acid, the kind you can never quite remember the day after. About four in the morning, the two of them disappeared into his room, and we didn't see them until the next day.

I suppose, out of the whole band, Mac was about the most surprising. Although we had always got along fine on a superficial level, I'd never been particularly close to Mac, or found him very outgoing, but on acid he seemed to stumble around, grinning like an idiot and hugging everyone that he met.

Jerry and I were standing in the kitchen, rapping some kind of cosmic shit while Ruth made some coffee, when Mac stumbled through the door with a bottle of wine. He put an arm round each of our shoulders, and offered us his bottle. While I took a hit on it he turned his attention to Jerry.

'How you feeling, old buddy? This LSD's powerful stuff, right?'

Jerry nodded solemnly.

'Powerful fine.'

Mac stared around.

'The whole fucking planet ought to have some. Get the whole human race out of its brains, right?'

He paused, and swallowed some wine.

'I feel fucking great man, so out of my brain, if everyone was as ripped as I was the world wouldn't have no problems, man. Everyone would just know, man, if they all got as loaded as this.'

Jerry and I both grinned.

'We're with you man, we're out on the edge with you.'

Mac hugged us both, and then looked very serious.

'You know something man, that's what the whole band's all about. It's us being out there on the edge, man, doing the things all the other fuckers want to do. Only doing it first, and doing it where they can see us. It's scary, but it really feels good. It feels right and I know we're going to make it. It all feels right. I know we're going to hold together and make it.'

If we'd been drunk the whole conversation would have just been maudlin, but the acid, unlike booze, gave it a truth which didn't shut down the various levels of perception but opened them up so we could feel ourselves growing together, getting stronger as the barriers that normally stand between individuals began to dissolve.

At the end of the trip, after the dawn had come up, we all retired into our own thoughts. I wandered into my room and stood watching the light filtering through the red curtain. Richard Strauss was swelling out of the stereo, and caught in the grip of the music I felt myself getting taller and taller, turning into some kind of Nietzschean superman. Then I pulled the curtain aside, looked out into the grey dawn on the grey streets, and instantly shrank back to a very ordinary Lou Francis. I decided I'd better find Ruth and lose myself.

Ruth didn't seem to be anywhere around. I looked in the living room and the kitchen, but neither she nor Jerry was anywhere to be found. I stuck my head round the door of Jerry's room, expecting to find them talking, but instead they were both naked, entwined together on his bed, obliviously balling.

More than a little piqued, I swallowed a couple of sleepers and went to bed on my own.

At the end of *Baby You Can't Stay Here* we have evolved a trick, it only lasts about a minute, of starting this straight G thing, just a kind of howl that gets faster and faster and then stops dead. It's a neat little round-off, and usually gets the kids going and dead eager for the next song.

I've finished the last verse, and we are just starting it when two little scrubbers in blue jeans and T-shirts break over the footlights. They are fielded okay and dragged off to the side, struggling, but then there's another one who gets so close that I can see her acne and sharp little pearly teeth before a couple of the crew get her. The roar of the ending goes on behind me, and suddenly there are two more. I'm horribly aware that six of the crew are already used up in coping with the first three.

Roth himself and two stage hands rush to intercept, but although they get one, the other eludes their clutching fingers, and she's on me, hands and fingernails homing right at my face. I swing sideways, duck my head and drop on to one knee. For a moment I hope that she's going to go right over my back but her clutching hands find purchase on the shoulder of my suit and the skin of my neck and hang on.

I straighten up and chop at her chest with my elbow, but she clings on like a leech, her nails digging in deeper. Then two of Roth's boys are there, prising her loose. As she goes, she takes precious souvenirs away under her fingernails.

The ending is still going on, being stretched out until the breakout has been contained so it doesn't look as though we stopped because of it. I look round to see if all is cool, but another crazy, male this time, has crawled across the footlights and is dancing towards Mac, shaking his loose uncoordinated arms like a mental case. A fat rent-a-cop grabs him by an outstretched arm and swings him into the wings, and, once he's out of sight of the audience, follows through with a chop to the back of the neck and a knee in the groin.

Once the last one has been removed and things are back to normal, Jerry gives the signal and everyone comes to a dead stop. A massive roar immediately replaces the music, and Jerry makes a facetious half bow over his guitar.

'Thank you, you're so wonderful, only some of you do get so excited.'

There's a laugh. I expect they imagine that the kid who danced on stage was politely conducted back to the auditorium, instead of lying, as he probably is, nursing his damaged nuts in one of the labyrinth of tunnels that lie under and behind the stage.

Jerry's rapping on the crowd, and I look round to see if I can find the doctor that we hired for the tour. He is already standing beside an amp. I move quickly back and he dabs at the scratches on my neck with some disinfectant on a cotton-wool swab. It stings like fuck, but I'm running too fast on energy to really pay it much attention. I notice as I stand still for the doctor that I'm shaking, my hands and my legs, and that there is a hollow feeling in my chest. I get a brief flash of paranoid vision, the nutter who might be sitting out there, nursing his madness and fondling his gun.

I notice Jerry has stopped talking and prowling about the stage. I move quickly forward, and sneak a glance at my watch. We're about halfway through.

The guitars start, and then Connie and Steve come in behind them. I have a moment of irrational panic, I don't know what song it is, but familiarity reasserts itself and I come in on cue.

Hey Miss Ann,

You don't understan'
What I hold in my han'
Ain't directed just at you.
Story ain't right
That far from your sight
I go out in the night.
Believe that really isn't true.

A terrible hammering on the door dragged me up from the depths of sleep. I rolled over and looked at my watch. It was eight-thirty. Who the hell was banging on the door at eight-thirty in the morning?

I lay motionless and hoped it would go away. There was a brief silence, and then it happened again. Furious, I jumped out of bed and struggled into my dressing gown, and padded out into the living room. Jerry was just emerging from his room, wrapped in a sheet. We looked at each other as the banging was repeated.

'Who the fuck can that be?'

I put a finger to my lips and crept towards the door.

'Who is it?'

For a moment there was no answer. Then a voice I had never heard before came from the other side.

'It's John.'

'Who?'

'John.'

This was bullshit. All my paranoias came together at once, it was obviously the police. I tried to stall them, wondering stupidly where the dope was.

'I'm sorry, we're all asleep. Could you come back later?'

Another voice came from beyond the door.

'We are police officers, open up, or we'll break the door down.'

I realized there were drugs of various sorts strewn all over the pad, and it would probably take us half an hour to find them all. Reluctantly, I opened the door. I opened my mouth to ask if they had a warrant, but before I could say a word I was pushed aside, and the room filled up with raglan coats and uniforms.

I suppose it was inevitable that we would get busted. Flower power had been in bloom for most of the summer, and a section of the West End Drug Squad seemed to have been gripped with some kind of groupie mania that resulted in musicians being hauled in by the dozen.

We were a pretty obvious target in that we were probably one of the most blatantly drug-orientated bands around with any kind of reputation. The album which we had produced just after our first experiments with psychedelics was riddled with cross references to all kinds of drug experience, and the tour that helped to push it to number five in the LP charts had come out of the rumour mill as one of the most debauched and dope crazed carnivals that had been since the Roman Empire declined and fell.

Jerry, Connie and I were assembled in a sleepy bunch in the living room, handed the warrant and informed that we were being raided under the Dangerous Drugs Act. Annabelle, the chick who had been in bed with Connie, was in his bedroom being grilled by a couple of policewomen as to her age, ancestry and reasons for being there. The whole deal seemed to be contrived to put us through the ultimate in loss of dignity. It is really degrading to have to watch a bunch of coppers pawing through your private things, and making what to their minds were probably smart remarks. It was made doubly unpleasant by the fact that they seemed to find it necessary to adopt poses that owed a lot to Stanley Baker playing a hard cop in some social realist gangster movie.

The funnies came fast and furious. One nark, who was searching the book case, held up a copy of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*.

‘Maybe we could have them for porn?’

Then another came across a Mao Tse Tung badge, which gave him a follow up line.

‘Or have ‘em all shipped out to Moscow.’

The fact that Mao was Chinese seemed to have escaped his notice.

Each time one of the cops unearthed a new rare delicacy, he would put it in a polythene bag and add it to the collection that they’d started on the mantelpiece in the living room. The pile of illegal substances grew and grew, while the three. of us dressed under the watchful eye of a cop each. We hadn’t seen anything of Annabelle, who was still being put through by the policewomen.

I thought vaguely that I ought to make an attempt to call Jimmy as soon as possible. Jimmy had done his best to try and avoid this situation, particularly after all the scenes when the Rolling Stones were busted. One of the first things that he did was to get us fixed up with a slick Harley Street doctor, who gave prescriptions for all manner of leapers, sleepers and the still legal cannabis tincture, a Victorian concoction of dope suspended in alcohol that a few shrewd doctors had unearthed to beat the drug laws. It tasted really foul to drink, but if you persevered it could get you first of all very drunk, and when that had worn off, incredibly stoned.

Of course, this legal set-up was far from sufficient for our growing appetites. For a start, there was no quasi-legal way to score acid. The doctor drew the line at giving us either cocaine or heroin, and although we swallowed bottles and bottles of tincture, it was really no substitute for honest smoking dope.

Eventually the police finished their search, and they all gathered together in the living room. On the mantelpiece there was a sizeable collection of various drugs, and the cop in charge faced us with a nasty smirk.

‘You lads got a fair old collection here, haven’t you?’

Jerry grinned at him.

‘Didn’t have to bring any with you though, did you?’

The cop scowled.

‘Don’t give me no lip, sunshine, or your life might get difficult. You may run around like Jack the Lad in your little pop group, but you’re with us now.’

Jerry fell silent. The cop motioned to one of his men, who started clearing the stuff off the mantelpiece and into a case. Then he turned back to us.

‘I suppose I don’t have to tell you that I’m arresting you under the Dangerous Drugs Act.’

We all nodded. Then he gathered his crew together, and we were taken downstairs to the van.

We were booked on suspicion at Bow Street police station, and our stash was taken off for analysis. Then the three of us were put in a cell and left alone for about half an hour. The whole morning had taken on a kind of dreamlike quality, and we sat for a while looking at each other in disbelief.

‘This is no way to start the day.’

‘You’re not kidding. What do you think is going to happen?’

‘Dunno, I suppose Jimmy will be down to get us out sooner or later.’

Jerry stood up.

‘I doubt he’ll be down all that quickly. He probably doesn’t even know what’s happened yet.’

‘The bastards could have let us make a phone call. I don’t believe all that crap about there being no lines available.’

I thought for a moment.

‘Does anyone actually know what drugs they found?’

The other two shook their heads, and then Jerry laughed.

‘Plenty I guess.’

‘Maybe we could work out roughly what must have been lying about.’

Connie leaned back against the tiled wall and stared at the ceiling.

‘Well ... all the speed and downers were legal. We can produce scripts for them, right?’

‘Right.’

‘Well, then, all I had was a few tabs of acid in a box on my table, and about an ounce of hash.’

‘How many tabs?’

‘Dunno, ten maybe.’

I looked at Jerry.

‘How about you?’

‘Not sure, about the same as Connie, I guess, a bit of dope, some acid and, oh yeah, a lump of opium.’

I added it all up in my head.

‘I had maybe another half ounce, a couple of tabs and a bit of meth crystal. That means we must have had about a couple of ounces of dope, maybe twenty tabs of acid, the meth and the opium. How much opium do you think we had?’

Jerry shrugged.

‘About a flyer’s worth.’

Connie grinned.

‘A fair old haul.’

‘Not enough to get done for dealing.’

‘They ain’t going to do us for dealing, it’s obvious that we’re a successful rock band, and don’t need to deal.’

‘It’s quite a lot of stuff though. I don’t fancy being made an example of.’

‘I don’t think there’s much chance of that after all the scenes that went down when they tried to put the Stones inside.’

Connie sat up again.

‘It’s still a fucking drag. I really don’t need to spend the morning locked up in here.’

Nobody said anything, but we all agreed with him, and sat in silence for a long time, thinking our own thoughts.

Just as we were beginning to come to the conclusion that we were there for the whole day, the cell door opened and a uniformed constable came in.

‘The sergeant says that you can make a phone call and arrange for bail. Do you all want to make one?’

We looked at each other, and Jerry shook his head.

‘We’d just better call Jimmy and let him sort this out.’

‘Who’s going to talk to him?’

Connie stood up.

‘I will. I’ll get him to come down here.’

He went off with the cop, and Jerry and I settled down to wait. Connie returned after about ten minutes.

‘I got through to Jimmy, he’s on his way down to get us out.’

‘Yeah, how did he take it?’

‘Well he wasn’t overjoyed, but he seemed to take it in his stride. There doesn’t seem to be too much that throws Jimmy.’

Another half hour passed, and then the young cop came back.

‘Come on. Your bail’s been sorted out.’

‘Great.’

We stood up, and trooped out behind him. Moments later, a policewoman brought

Annabelle down from the women's section. She looked pale and worried.

We signed the bail slip, got our property back and were told to report in two weeks when the lab report on our drugs would be back, and we could be formally charged. Then we were let out of the white tiles and cabbage smells of the interior of the nick. In the entrance hail Jimmy was waiting. He hurried us out, on to the street and into a taxi.

'Had to go and get yourselves busted then?'

We avoided his eyes like guilty schoolboys, and said nothing.

'Still, it could be worse, they only wanted five hundred to lose the acid, the opium and the meth, oh yes, and another two hundred to let the girl go.'

Connie twitched.

'Annabelle, I forgot all about her. Did she get out?'

Jimmy nodded.

'Yeah, she went on home. She asked for you to ring her later.'

Our bust, of course, following so hard on the heels of the Stones, got all over the papers, and when, three weeks later, we showed up at Bow Street magistrates court, there were a couple of hundred assorted freaks waiting around the entrance to the court.

With Bow Street being so close to the Covent Garden fruit market, some of the kids, either by buying them cheap or ripping them off, had armed themselves with huge bunches of flowers, with which they showered us as we made our run from the car to the courthouse. Inside the door, we turned and watched the first tactical use of flowers that we had ever seen, as a line of uniformed policemen began to herd the kids away down the street.

The confrontation got under way, the flowers began to get hurled just as though they were real missiles, and the symbolism even began to get to the cops. Four of them detached themselves from the general line and rushed forward, a tiny phalanx of blue, plunging into the multi-coloured sea of freaks to grab a particular kid, in a leather jacket, with a bushy Hendrix haircut, who had been rushing around, throwing his flowers and yelling 'love' with an old fashioned rocker ferocity.

Before we could see what happened to him, a sergeant began hassling us to surrender to bail, and we were forced to leave the doorway and go past the bunch of cops who hung around the prisoners' entrance.

Under the court there was a kind of long white tiled tank with a wooden bench along one wall. This was where we had to wait. It was a depressing place, with maybe twenty or thirty other men all waiting for their go in the due process of law. Some were engaged in feverish conversation with their lawyers, others just chatted in groups waiting for the time to pass, others still just sat and stared while the drunks declaimed their sad tale to anyone who would listen and hustled round bumming cigarettes and picking dog ends.

At one end of the tank there was a heavy oak door, and every few minutes a sergeant would poke his head round it and yell the names of the next people to go up. I had resigned myself to a long wait, and was still thinking about the kids outside. It seemed as though, like it or not, they were our people, and that, if the confrontations went on, the flower symbols would more than likely progress to something a lot heavier.

Before I was in the least way ready for it, I heard the sergeant shouting our names.

'Deacon, Francis and Raymond.'

We stood up and sauntered to the door, trying hard to look casual. For the first time, the thought hit me that we could actually be sent to prison, and a cold knot seemed to form in my stomach.

The court room was a complete contrast to the cells beneath. Its wood panelling and comfortable men in their tidy suits invested it with an air of spurious dignity. After you had

been in its manifestly reasonable civilized atmosphere for a few minutes, it was easy to forget that the reality of crime and punishment was below, with the cold, dirt and despair of the yellow bulbs and echoing tiles.

We pleaded guilty, and after the police evidence our lawyer bullshitted the magistrate for about ten minutes about the terrible strain that being jerked into fame and fortune had placed us under.

There was a long horrid pause as the magistrate considered what he was going to do with us. I glanced at Jerry and he shrugged, then we were told to stand up. I felt supremely vulnerable standing in that dock. It was a thousand times worse than being on stage because it was a situation that was set up in a way that gave you no control over any part of the proceedings.

After stern reminders of the responsibilities we had to the 'young people who were attracted to our music', we were fined two hundred pounds, and that was that. We were taken back down into the tank and processed out. After Jimmy had paid the fines, we headed for the entrance where the reporters and the flower children were waiting.

It was just after we were busted that Creeping Rodney began to show up, and virtually took up residence at the pad.

Rodney, he only got the title 'Creeping' after he'd been hanging round for a while, first appeared one night when Jerry and I had got very drunk at Blaises and invited all the people around our table back to the flat to party.

Our little home around this time was going through a particularly hectic stage, and almost every night it was overrun by hordes of freaks who turned up after the clubs had finally shut. In the course of one of these early morning riots, someone had nailed a sign to the door that read 'The Dark Tower', and I guess we did the best we could to live up to the name.

Rodney was a little furtive guy with wispy blond hair who reminded me of a cartoon ferret in a very cheap wig. When he first began coming round we hardly really noticed him. We were having trouble with this huge ugly American chick who was trying so hard to be a combination of Mae West and Janis Joplin, and who had a disconcerting habit of stripping her clothes off and freaking out when she felt she wasn't getting enough attention. It was through her that Rodney first came to our notice, one night when she was being particularly obnoxious.

Rodney was a speed freak whose rap was a confused mishmash of astrology, UFOs and bits and pieces of eastern religion. He wore the best quality robes from Mr Fish and Granny's, and since he had no visible income, it was assumed he nicked them from musicians and dealers who were too out of it to know what was happening.

He had these strange eyes that I imagine he thought were mystic, but also enabled him to avoid ever looking directly into anyone's eyes.

His one redeeming feature, and the one that ensured people tolerated him and let him hang out, was the way in which he had cultivated a talent for fixing things. It was this ability that came to the fore when the American chick finally went over the top. It was Rodney who managed to persuade her to put her clothes on, and got her outside and into a cab. I don't know what he said to her as they were going down in the lift, but from then on she never came round again, although we did see her backstage at a Roundhouse rock show where an American guitar king was furiously kicking her arse.

The next stage on our involuntary adoption of Rodney was when he started to come on gigs with us. He was actually very useful insofar as he held the drugs for us, which was important when out of town judges were still handing out jail sentences for simple possession, and he was always willing to run out for booze and cigarettes, and deal with hassles from kids who had managed to get backstage and wanted to involve us in their schemes for world

domination or sell us some kind of new wonder drug they had cooked in their bathtubs.

I guess it was the stream of people who surround any reasonably successful band that attracted Rodney and the others like him. The crowd brought with them a continuing supply of conversation, drugs and sex. It was almost as if this generation paid tribute to its musicians the way previous ones had to their priests. A lot of guys would hang round with bands acting as some kind of unpaid servants, just to be on the scene, always at the party, and, of course, to have a chance with the chicks. Creeping Rodney was different from the normal run of these people in just one respect. He wasn't after the chicks. In his case the attraction was boys, the strange, star-struck teenagers who, just like groupies, seemed to bask in the charisma generated by a band.

In our case, there weren't many of these hangers on who were overtly homosexual, although their exaggerated hero worship obviously concealed strong gay tendencies, and it was in that psychological undergrowth that Creeping Rodney hunted.

His usual technique was crude but effective. He'd pick the one he fancied, load him up with acid and then work on his sexual guilts until he had him begging for some kind of symbolic absolution. What Rodney usually suggested was that the kid should seek absolution through balling him. His success rate was phenomenal, and we were all filled with a nasty amusement at these eager young things getting their tender boyish minds shattered by Rodney's machinations. An additional attraction of this normally unlikeable little guy was that his anxiousness to stay in favour provided a ready made target for the band's collective sadism, which never seemed to be all that far from most of our relationships.

Everything seemed to be running smoothly for both us and Rodney, until he started to become ambitious and began aiming his attentions at the band.

I, for some reason, was his first target. I'd noticed that for about a week he had been singling me out for special attention. It hadn't clicked with me at all until, early one morning, the crunch came.

Jerry and I had been to some kind of upper echelon flower power party, which involved rubbing shoulders with a gang of dope dealers, hustling poets, boutique owners and Chelsea spades posing as Huey P. Newton. I'd managed to fill my head with a combination of mescaline and amphetamine sulphate, while Jerry, on the other hand, had downed, enormous quantities of alcohol and barbiturates, so when we finally got home he immediately fell over and crashed out while I was left feeling jagged and totally unable to sleep.

Rodney was asleep in an armchair, and after pacing around for about ten minutes I decided I might as well wake Rodney up, and then I'd at least have someone to talk at. I put on *The Who Sell Out* very loud, and Rodney slowly came awake.

'Hello Lou, have you been home long?'

I shook my head.

'No, about a quarter of an hour.'

'Do you want some tea?'

'Nah, I'm a bit out of my brain. You got any mandies?'

Rodney shook his head.

'Not a one. I took my last one earlier.'

'How about a cigarette?'

'Sure.'

He bent forward and fumbled in his coat that was folded on the floor beside the chair. He produced a packet of Piccadilly and I took one.

'Light?'

He struck a match and held it out to the end of my cigarette. The mescaline highlighted a strange sexual overtone, and part of the hallucination gave his face a skull-like, predatory look. I found I had to avoid his eyes, and I straightened up, walked over to the window and

stared out at the lights of the Post Office tower, high above the other buildings.

'Are you all right, Lou?'

I kept my back to him.

'Sure, I'm just very stoned. I had a bunch of speed and mescaline at this party.'

'You don't seem very happy.'

His motherly concern began to irritate me, and I felt an overwhelming urge to counter attack, to cut him down.

'Sure I'm happy, I'm perfectly happy. How about you, Rodney, are you happy? What do you get out of hanging round with us boys?'

I turned to look at him. His face had taken on a hurt, dog-like expression.

'You know what I get out of it.' His voice was very quiet.

'It's no different to everyone else puffing chicks, and I always try to be useful.'

'You'll be a wonderful mother to someone some day.'

'You've got no right to put me down. I know you're Lou Francis, the great big rock and roll star, and I'm staying at your house, and I'm nobody, but you've still got no right to put me down like that.'

'Have I hurt you Rodney?'

'Sure it hurts. I try to have some kind of relationship with women, but it just never happens. At least I don't use anyone to work out my nasties. I don't have any illusions about what I am.'

'Your karma's okay?'

'Course it is.'

'Meaning mine isn't?'

'I didn't say that.'

'But you meant it? You think maybe I live under some sort of illusion?'

'What about your scene with Jerry?'

'What do you mean "scene"?'

'You've got to admit the two of you have a pretty intense relationship under all that butch display.'

'Are you suggesting that me and Jerry...'

Rodney did his best to look patient and saintly.

'I'm not suggesting anything. It's your trip. I was just trying to point out that you ought to think about yourself before you start to put other people down.'

Rodney's insinuation about Jerry and myself started me thinking. On stage there was something very physical. I tried to picture ourselves in bed, but the details wouldn't fit together although the idea came easily. I felt myself softening towards Rodney. I sat down in the other armchair with the mescaline still swirling my thoughts.

'I dunno man. I guess everyone who's in a band has to be a bit of a fag to keep the whole thing together, but all my sexual expression seems to be directed at women. I really don't see myself screwing some geezer. I really don't see it.'

'Are you sure it's not just your conditioning?'

I thought about it. Maybe it was, it was so hard to tell. I looked up, and, for once, Rodney was staring straight at me. I didn't say anything and there was a long pause. The drugs in my head took another turn and began to feel smaller and smaller.

'I don't know, man, I just don't know. You get so much conditioning against homosexuality that it's really hard to sort it out.'

'You don't have to tell me about the conditioning this society gives out against homosexuals. I got busted for indecency when I was in college. I was on remand for two weeks, it's no joke being in a remand centre when everyone knows you're a queer. They used to call me Alice.'

His pain and bitterness started to get through to me.

'I'm sorry Rod, I didn't know.'

'It's okay, it's in the past. It's just very hard when your friends turn on you because of what you are.'

'Listen man, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.'

He smiled sadly.

'That's okay man. I just wish I was able to help you through some of your problems.'

I began to feel really sorry for the little guy, and had an overwhelming urge to stretch out my hand, to touch him and show that I understood. I leaned forward.

'Rod...I...'

Under the sad spaniel expression, I suddenly saw something that looked like a hint of triumph. Everything fell into place with a crash of paranoia. I realized I was being reeled in. I was falling for the same line that he used on the kids from the audience. I straightened up with a jerk.

'Rod, I'm going to bed. I'll see you later.'

I saw disappointment flash across his face as I walked past him and into my bedroom.

Sleep didn't come for a long time, and I lay there thinking, about me and Jerry, about Rodney. I felt pity for him in his disappointment, and thought of the chicks that I'd really fancied and who had turned me down. I was sorry for him, but it wasn't my fault that I couldn't get off behind the two of us romping together. I thought of the disappointment that the unreachability of people like us brought to all the fans who got hung up on us. In many ways, just like strippers, disappointment was our business.

After a long time, I fell asleep.

The major result of our getting busted was that Jimmy decided we ought to put down another single, and after it was finished, do a fairly extensive tour of England before it was actually released. He felt that after all the publicity of the bust, we ought to go on the road and let the flower of English youth have a look at this unique collection of dope-fiends and degenerates, provided of course that the flower of English youth were willing to pay for the privilege.

The single caused a good deal of confusion at first. Jimmy had an initial idea that we ought to do some kind of flower power single, and get solidly behind the hippies. We weren't altogether too keen on the idea, feeling the tried and tested sense of evil would win through in the end. This I suppose was the first time we approached a head on clash with Jimmy, although the crunch never really came, because, as we were still arguing about it, the first signs of decay set in among the flower children, and he decided it was better to forget the whole idea.

The problem still remained as to what exactly we were going to do. If we weren't going to immerse ourselves in peace and love, then what direction were we going to follow? A strange realization began to dawn on the whole band that the more successful a band became, the more exposed it got. A small band can wait around, watch for new trends and latch on to them, but as it nears the top, a group begins to find out that it more and more has to take a chance on creating its own situations. In order to maintain its position it is almost forced to strike out in new and unknown directions, and see if anyone will follow.

We were faced with exactly that dilemma. We had to choose what to do, at least for the next six or nine months, and if we chose wrong it would more than likely be a disaster. We weren't big enough to be able to make a mistake and hope to get away with it.

It was a crisis, and as such it required a full-scale meeting up in Jimmy's white room. Accordingly, we all gathered there. It was a warm pleasant late summer afternoon, the windows were wide open, and a muted roar came up from the traffic in the street. After Pat

had handed round drinks and Steve had dug out Jimmy's stash and undertaken the responsibilities of joint roller, we got down to business. Jimmy, as usual, led off the meeting.

'So kiddies, what are we going to do? The where-do-we-go-from-here problem seems to loom large.'

There was a silence, nobody seemed anxious to jump in with -any bright ideas. In the end Jerry stopped staring at the ceiling, leaned forward in his chair and swirled the ice around in his Scotch and Coke.

'So we've got to do a tour, and a single, and both of them should have some sort of central idea to tie the whole thing together. Right?'

Jimmy nodded.

'It'd be ideal if the idea we used could be carried through to the next album and even beyond.'

Connie scowled.

'It seems like whatever we decide on now we've got to live with for a good while.'

'What do we have at the moment? A bit of. sadism and a reputation around the hippies for being prodigious drug takers.'

Steve looked up from where he was rolling a joint in the corner.

'You can't do much better than drugs.'

'True.'

Connie still looked unhappy.

'What kind of drugs? Smoking dope ain't no big deal, and we've got too much of a reputation for being mean to suddenly become hippy-dippy acid mystics. I mean, you know, paisley doesn't suit me.'

Jerry swung round in his chair.

'I don't see why we shouldn't go along with telling people that they ought to get right out of their skulls.
There ain't nothing wrong with acid.'

Connie shrugged.

'I didn't mean I had anything against acid. I just don't want to get involved in any kind of weird sort of Leary mystic thing.'

'You think we ought to carry on pretty much the way we were going?'

'Yeah, just expanded a lot.'

'More drugs, sex and violence.'

'You can't beat that, it's a winning combination.'

'It's got to be bad-arse sex and drugs though.'

'We've really got to be the bad guys, you know. I really think that's our role.'

'We gotta come on like it's the Goths arriving.'

'A bit more sophisticated than Goths. Goths are a bit over butch, know what I mean?'

'Queer Goths.'

Everyone fell about, even Jimmy, although he was the first one to recover and bring us back to order. Jerry began to have the glazed look that usually preceded an idea.

'I'd really like to do this tour properly. Really build it up so we can smash into their precious little elf world fantasies like the fucking Nazgul.'

'What do you mean, ride in on fucking great black horses?'

'No, seriously. We ought to start putting the band over as kind of brain damaged and vicious with it. Make much more of the individuals.'

He glanced at Jimmy.

'It's a PR job really. We ought to start getting sold as individuals. Lou ought to be pushed as some kind of crazed James Dean figure. Twitchy, fucked up and unpredictable. Make up stories about how he vanishes for days on end, hangs round Chinese opium dens and fucks

amputees. The nova kid.'

I wondered how I was going to live with all that, but before I could say anything, Jerry raced on.

'I could be turned into some crazy flutter extrovert. A sort of technicolour werewolf who goes into destructive rages. And Mac could be a sort of mean henchman, like the James Coburn part in *Magnificent Seven.* Connie's the vicious little drug addict who mugs grannies, and Steve the silent psychopath who keeps dead babies preserved in jars in his basement. It'd be the greatest thing to hit Britain since World War Two. It'd be fucking amazing. Screaming rock and roll, and feedback, and lights flashing and these horrible evil figures leaping about in the middle of it all, howling about blood and death and transvestites and injections. Just imagine it!'

It was mid-October, and we were flogging it up the M6. It was one of those autumn days when the sunshine pouring through the windscreen can almost fool you that it is really hot outside.

We had the heater running full blast, and the radio was bubbling some kind of rubbish, but only at a level to blend with the engine and the rush of the car. The interior had the sleepy smell of dope, warm leather and gasoline, and I sat in the back corner seat with my head pressed against the glass watching the fields and yellowing trees rush past.

Jerry's original ideas about how the tour should go had, to a large extent, been pushed through to reality. Jimmy's PR man had started dropping all kinds of weird little stories on the music papers that began to build a very strange image of the band. I was gradually evolving into a weird combination of Byron and Jesse James, which, if I let myself slip, could really tend to take hold of my personality.

We had managed to put together, under the direction of a crazy giant of an electrician called Arthur, an array of lighting techniques that bypassed the usual blob show and gave the act a jagged, frenetic visual that totally matched the music. The whole thing began to take on the air of a kind of electronic paganism.

The only problem was that the way we worked each show, and the fact that we had twenty-three of them in a month, were inclined to push us to the limits of our physical stamina. We overcame the gradual slowing down with the help of a bent doctor in Bayswater who, as long as we gave him the money, seemed more than happy to give us scripts for all the methedrine we wanted.

It gave us the boost we needed, but it was also very destructive anywhere but on stage, and in the interminable car journeys it led us into mounting paranoia, once the furious speed raps had worked themselves out over the first few days. When you lapsed into silence behind a couple of amps of meth, your brain went on racing and Rosch characters began to creep out of hedgerows at the edge of your vision. The only answer was to get through the day on sleepers and tranquilizers, and then down some meth a while before going on stage. By halfway through the tour we seemed to be living in a stoned twilight, drifting between being asleep and half awake, except for the brief flash of energy when we were on stage, and the few hours of wind-down when when we partied after the show.

Jerry and Connie got sufficiently into the whole thing so that they developed a real hangup about needles and began shooting all their meth, and even tried a few experiments with liquid Valium. They got very evangelical and were constantly trying to get Steve, Mac and me to start using a works, but their comparative conservatism and my total horror of injections meant that we went on pouring our intravenous methedrine into Cokes or glasses of milk, swallowing and feeling, somehow, more moral.

We swung off the motorway and drive through miles of Northern suburb. It was so strange, roaring through the gathering dusk, to see these comfortable families behind the fishbowl -

windows, eating their fish fingers, too early to draw the curtains, but late enough for the telly to fill their rooms with that unique grey blue light. Their lives seemed so far from where we were swimming desperately in an emotional sea that they had only dipped their toes in.

It was another town hail with the usual maze of concrete stairs between the stage door and the dressing room with its hard chairs, chipped wooden table, mirror with four tally light bulbs, a bank of heat pipes running across the wall and the fire bucket in the corner. It was the standard minimum unit that would do for opera singers, wrestlers or rock musicians.

Eddie brought the guitars and cases out of the car, and we wandered through the backstage corridors looking for the stage.

There was an hour to go before the audience would come in, and the equipment was set up for a sound test. The support group was fussing over their gear, which was set up in front of ours and would be pulled out of the way before we came on. We swaggered across the stage, making everyone aware that we were the stars of the show.

We nodded to the other group, we always tried to come on ultra democratic.

'Hi.'

'Hello.'

'Who are you?'

'Spaceship Earth.'

I made a guess in the dark.

'Didn't you lot have a single a couple of months ago?'

They all looked pleased.

'It was more like six months actually.' I nodded.

'Yeah, I thought I'd heard it somewhere.'

I sauntered off. it's amazing how patronizing a successful band can be to an unsuccessful one when you think of what a great part chance plays in the rock business.

Chas scrambled across the footlights.

'Hey, hey, Lou. Want to try the PA?'

'Is my mike on?'

'Sure. Go ahead.'

Before I could make a sound, Connie started flailing away at his drums.

'Hey Connie!'

He stopped.

'What?'

'Shut the fuck up for a minute. I want to suss the PA.'

He shrugged, dropped his sticks and stood up. I went up to the mike, There's an uncanny feeling of potential power looking out over the dusty row of empty seats.

'One, two.'

The acoustics in the place were marginally better than in a swimming bath.

'Chas, can you knock off the bass a bit?'

Chas nodded from behind the mixer, and I tried again.

Since my baby left me.

To my surprise Jerry came in behind me with the two guitar chords. Chas yelled up to us. -

'Okay, let's try a balance on the instruments.'

There was a lot of twanging and buzzing while Mac, Steve and Jerry got in tune, then Connie thumped around a while getting his drums in position. Finally they broke out into a fast boogie. Chas walked out into the middle of the hall, and then hurried back to his nest behind the mixer. After making a few alterations, he signalled to me to start singing.

Woke up this morning,
Knew I had the blues,
Roaches in my beard

An' lizards in my shoes,

'Okay Chas how's that?'

I walked away from the mike, and the music came to a ragged halt.

Connie got up from behind the drums.

'How does that sound, Chas?'

'It'll do.'

'Okay, don't let anyone fuck with my drums, I got them positioned just right. See you later.'

'Right. Hey listen, Lou, Mac and Jerry, can you do something so I can do a rough balance on the vocal mikes?'

Obediently we lined up behind our mikes. Jerry counted with his finger.

Dum dum dum dooby do wah Woe yay yeah, yeah.

'How 'bout that Chas?'

'Lovely balance but otherwise rotten.'

'We love you too man. Listen, we're going to the dressing room, see you in a while.'

'Okay, is Eddie going to score some tack?'

'Yeah, I'll get him to go out.'

Upstairs in the dressing room the promoter and a couple of his gimpy mates were already hanging around. At least they'd brought a bottle of Scotch and a crate of complimentary beers. Nonetheless, we still got Eddie to run out for more booze and a load of take-away Chinese.

After Eddie had been got together, we wandered over to the promoter and made polite conversation.

'How have the tickets gone?'

The promoter beamed.

'Great. There's only about a hundred and fifty left.'

'Far out.'

I helped myself to some Scotch. Jerry and Connie were beginning to look twitchy. They wanted some meth, but jacking up with the promoter looking on wasn't too cool, particularly as he didn't look as though he could tell meth from heroin. For about five minutes we froze him out, then he realized that we didn't want him. He put on a fake, hearty showbiz grin.

'Well boys, I'll leave you to get ready.'

As the door shut behind him, there was a jolly chorus of snapping ampoules. As the speed ritual was ended, Chas turned up.

'The punters are coming in.'

Jerry looked up from packing away his works, and tossed him a piece of dope.

'Wanna roll a joint?'

Chas pulled up a chair and cleared a space on the table.

'Any of you boys gonna give the handsome roadie an amp of meth?'

'Listen to the burly bastard, why can't he score his own?'

'He was demanding his dinner only a while back.'

'Oh yeah. Did it come yet?'

'Dinner and meth! He's a fucking barbarian.'

'I want the meth for later, don't I? I'll be humping fucking gear when all you bastards are carousing up the hotel.'

'We let you stay in the same hotel, don't we?'

'Oh thankee master.'

'That's better, you can't get no respect from servants these days.'

With just over an hour before we were due to go on, we settled down to smoke and drink the edge off the speed, and pick at the food that Eddie had brought back.

The dressing room began to fill up with people. They were, I suppose, the city's big-time hippies. Their scenes began to make me claustrophobic and I split out into the corridor.

There were three girls outside the dressing room being chatted up by some guys who must have come with the support band. I think my appearance blew his come on because they immediately froze him, and he mumbled something and wandered off.

'Hello.'

'Hi.'

Their dress and attitude was almost, but not quite, what you'd find in a London club. It must have taken a lot of work. The one in the middle with long dark hair took all my points for effort. She had a black, wet-look mini dress, black patent thigh boots, lots of Vampirella makeup and even purple nail varnish. She had obviously taken a lot of trouble to fit with the band's image. I grinned at her.

'How did you manage to get back here?'

'It wasn't easy.'

I offered them a hit on the bottle of wine I'd brought out with me, then I turned to Lady Macbeth's two mates.

'Why don't you go on in and meet the others? They're quite harmless really.'

I opened the door, and they eagerly hurried inside. Bat-woman didn't follow them. I put my arm around her shoulder and steered her down the corridor.

'What's your name?'

'Lenore.'

Yeah, and mine's Peregrine.

'Like in *The Raven?'*

Sussed. She nodded.

'That's right.'

A Northern accent clashed with Marlene Dietrich delivery. 'There'll more than likely be a party at the hotel after. Want to come?'

She nodded.

'If that's okay?'

'Sure.'

I opened a door and led her into an empty dressing room, and immediately she presented herself for a routine pawing. I kissed her and ran my hand down her body. It was like a cattle market, but what the hell, if I behaved any other way it would spoil the whole trip for her. She pressed herself against me in urgent invitation and I began to get off behind it in a vague stoned way. Then I stepped back.

'I've got to get changed. Get the name of the hotel off..;'

'I've already got it.'

She really had tried hard.

'Okay then. Tell the porter you're Lenore, I'll leave word that you're cool. Let's shoot back to the dressing room.'

'Can I watch you from the stage?'

'Sure. Only don't get in the way. Follow us down there as we go on.'

I hurried her back down the corridor, kissed her and turned my attention to getting it together.

With all the talk of new images, I'd hustled Jimmy to get me a black snakeskin jacket and some leather pants. As I was pulling them on the thought suddenly struck me that Lenore was just the type who'd end up wanting to be beaten. I shrugged mentally and finished dressing.

I had just done my eye shadow when the meth came out again. I tipped half an amp into a half empty beer bottle and gulped it down, then I went looking for Chas. I found him chatting to one of Lenore's mates.

‘Has the support band come off yet?’

‘’Bout another five minutes.’

‘Fuckers, they’re only supposed to do forty-five minutes.’

‘That’s what they’re doing. They got started late.’

‘They could come off early. I don’t want some council jobs-worth pulling the plugs on us because we’ve overrun.’

‘Don’t worry so much, we can cut down the interval, and anyway, nobody pulls my plugs.’

‘Okay, okay.’

I could feel myself getting more and more tense, then I saw the other band straggling up the corridor, their clothes sticking to them and their hair plastered down with sweat. I hurried back into the dressing room.

‘The other lot are off.’

‘All right.’

Steve, Jerry and Mac were putting their guitars in tune through the small tune up amp in the dressing room. I began to get impatient as they twanged at each other. I could feel myself slipping into an involuntary little knee snapping dance. I wanted to get started.

‘Why don’t we get ourselves down there?’

Jerry looked up impatiently from tuning his second guitar. ‘Okay, okay, stop fretting, give them time to get the gear off.’

I picked up my towel, a couple of cans of beer and my cigarettes. I lit one, taking it as slowly as possible to kill the waiting time.

‘Come on, let’s get down to the stage.’

Jerry slung a guitar over each shoulder.

‘Let’s go, then.’

We all trooped out of the dressing room, clattered down the stairs and out on to the stage. The curtain had been drawn for the interval, turning the stage into a tall narrow room, kind of like a church. Chas was standing with Eddie in the middle of the stage, taking a last look to see that everything was set. I dumped my towel behind an amp and walked across to them.

‘Everything okay?’

‘Sure.’

‘How’s the crowd?’

‘Packed out and noisy.’

‘All right, are they?’

‘Should be.’

‘No trouble then?’

‘I don’t think so, but Eddie’ll be keeping an eye on them, and the promoter’s got a bunch of lads in the wings.’

‘Good. Are the mikes on?’

‘As soon as I get down there and take them off standby.’

There were stabs of sound from behind me as the rest of them checked out their instruments. After a few moments, Jerry turned away from his amplifiers and nodded at me.

‘I think we’re all together.’

‘Okay.’

I walked over to my mike.

‘One, two.’

My voice came back strongly from the monitors. I stepped back, and nodded towards the wings. The work lights went off, and the stage was in semi-darkness. Then Jerry counted us in and as the curtains divided we crashed into the first number.

Directly the curtains had opened I pranced forward carrying my mike stand. There was a cheer from the crowd.

I threw away my jacket at the end of the first song, and sweating like a pig, we began to get down to business.

'All right boys and girls, you better understand this is a rock and roll show, and you fuckers better understand that rock and roll is the energy.'

'Rock and roll can get you to Venus!'

'So how come you're all sitting in straight seats, in straight rows?'

'You straight?'

I glanced theatrically at Jerry.

'I can't hear 'em, man. They gotta be straight?' Jerry yelled at them again.

'You fuckers straight?' There was a shout of no.

'Okay then. You better get out of your seats and shake your arses. Right?'

They started into a sort of Otis Redding everybody-clap-your-hands thing.

'Okay, let's see everyone out of their seats. I wanna see you all romp and stomp. I wanna see you kick up some noise. I wanna hear a little energy. All right?'

Jerry and Mac came in with back-up vocals and the song began to build up.

I wanna see a little energy.

I wanna see it goin' down.

I wanna see a little energy.

I wanna see it runnin' over town.

1 wanna see a little energy.

I wanna see it, I wanna see it, you better believe that's true.

I wanna see some, I wanna see it comin' out of you.

It started them going. Slowly at first, and then like one great herd, the kids began to move down to the front of the stage, and filled up the aisles. Among the crowd of dancing freaks, the white hats of commissionaires bobbed about, trying to get the audience to return to their seats. There was a line of faces that showed as a row of white blobs with glazed eyes that just cleared the level of the stage. The shorter ones could actually rest their chins on it, while others stretched their arms out over the footlights, as though reaching for our feet.

A burly kid with a headband and a Charlie Brown T-shirt clambered on to the stage and started to dance about, flapping his arms and facing the audience. Before Chas or any of the stewards could reach him, Jerry had rushed straight at him like a tackling football player and knocked him clean off the stage. The kid offered so little resistance that Jerry almost toppled into the audience himself, only recovering his balance at the last minute.

From that point on, we had it all our own way. The commissionaries did most of it for us. Push a crowd backwards, and they automatically push back again. The subconscious idea that there was something trying to stop them seeing us made us all the more attractive.

We finished by doing two encores, and although they yelled and stamped we didn't do a third. By that time we were exhausted. I had to cling to a fire ladder in the wings, gasping for breath, before I could even attempt to make it to the dressing room. I felt sick and drained, but finally wrapped my towel round my shoulders and managed to stagger up the stairs.

In the dressing room, Connie was lying flat on a bench looking white, blotchy and ill, his hair plastered down on his face with sweat, and his chest heaving. Jerry, Mac and Steve were propped in chairs in a similar condition.

'I think I'm dying.'

'Jesus, that was really working. We've really got to cut down the encores or my little bod's going to give out.'

'Is there anything to drink?'

Eddie stopped putting away the guitars and popped a can of beer.

'Here.'

I took it, and although it was lukewarm I swallowed it greedily. My mouth was sticky, dry

and tasted really foul. Within seconds, I felt the beer pour off me in the form of sweat. Gradually I began to feel more human, and after a while I stripped off my soaked shirt and towelled myself off. The others came gradually to life.

Chas walked into the dressing room looking for Eddie.

'The kids are all out of the hall.'

Jerry looked up.

'Can we go, then?'

'We still got to collect the bread.'

Eddie picked up the leather attache case that he carried the money in. Connie glanced at him.

'Do you expect any aggravation?' Eddie shook his head.

'Don't think so. He seemed as good as gold. I'll be back in a minute, and then we can split.'

Back at the hotel there were a few kids waiting. We signed autographs for them, exchanged a couple of words, and hurried inside.

Lenore, a white Afghan coat over her black gear, and about three other girls were waiting in the foyer, the big fans, who didn't have to be in by midnight. We walked over to them and said hello. I turned to Connie.

'Where's the party tonight?'

'Your room?'

'It's always my fucking room. How about someone else's?'

'Okay, mine then. What about the bar though?'

I turned to the desk clerk.

'When does the bar shut?'

The clerk grinned.

'I daresay Tom'll stay open as long as you want to drink.'

'Thanks.'

I turned back to Connie, Lenore and the others.

'Okay, why don't you all go into the bat? I'm going upstairs to wash and change, and I'll meet you in about fifteen minutes.'

Lenore moved closer to me.

'Can I come with you?'

I shook my head.

'No, I'll just have a quick shower and be back down. Go with the others and I'll see you in a while.'

I fumbled in my coat, and gave her a pound.

'Here, buy some drinks, get me a brandy and Coke, I won't be very long.'

She shrugged.

'Okay.'

She followed the others towards the bar, and I stepped into the lift. I wasn't ready for private scenes with chicks yet. The whole band needed to unwind by getting good and drunk.

I found my room, slung mycase on the bed and inspected it. There was the standard plywood, plastic veneer and foam rubber. A TV set stood in a corner and the phone was on the wall over the bed. There were two cheap abstracts and the colour scheme was a retiring orange and green. It was as though they sold these rooms like hobby kits. The Mark III Cosmopolitan Hotel, collect nineteen thousand wrappers and it's yours. You can find identical rooms anywhere from Lisbon to Tokyo.

I hurried myself out of my clothes, pulled on the free shower cap from out of the bathroom cabinet and stepped into the shower. I soaped under my armpits and let the suds run down my body. I was too tired to do anything else. After I'd dried myself on the hotel towel and

thrown it in a corner, I put on a pair of velvet trousers and a kind of Hamlet thing, a tunic I guess, some kind of cross between a shirt and jacket that I'd scored from Mr Fish. I brushed my hair and looked into the mirror, wondering if I should put on some more makeup. I finally decided not to. It was too late in the day to start freaking out the barman, and I settled for a pair of aviator shades. I couldn't be bothered to pull my boots on again, and so I dragged a pair of old moccasins out ofmy bag, and slipped my feet into them.

I grabbed my key, ciggies, lighter and a couple of flyers and headed down the corridor and into the lift.

As I walked through the foyer, I suddenly flashed on the ironic reversal of roles. I pick up this chick, and directly rush off to slip into something more comfortable. Maybe reappearing in these Garbo shades and this purple velvet Hamlet drag was just a bit strong, but I suppose one of the consolations of this business is being able to come on strong and get away with it.

In the bar I found everyone was already well into drinking, and apart from a couple of very maudlin businessmen, each with a hard-faced brass with him, we had the bar to ourselves. Jerry was already showing signs, and started up as soon as I walked up to the bar.

'Oooh look at her, doesn't she look nice in her après ski?'

I took the brandy and Coke that Lenore held out to me.

'I rather fancied myself as Hamlet.'

'I rather fancied Hamlet too.'

'Play your cards right and you might get off with me.'

I quickly gulped down the brandy before Jerry could come back with some ritual response.

'Who's going to buy me another drink?' Connie was propped up against the bar.

'We aren't buying them, we're charging them all.'

'Great, can you ask the man to give me one?'

'What do you want?'

'A brandy, forget the Coke this time.'

I flopped into a chair next to Lenore. It was time to make some kind of token conversation.

'How do you think we went tonight?'

'Great.'

'Have you seen us before?'

'Yeah, I saw you at the Top Rank.'

'Yeah? That was a while back.'

'You've got a lot better since then.'

'Didn't you like us at the Top Rank?'

'Oh yeah, I dug it like, you were doing that thing with the whip and everything, but it was kind of rough. It seems mud more slick and powerful now. I was really knocked out to. night.'

'Good. What do you do?'

'Me? I work in this boutique in Market Street, and now and then I do a spot of modelling.'

'You going to go to work tomorrow?'

'Tomorrow's Sunday.' I shook my head.

'Really? I've lost all track of what day it is. Did you say you did modelling?'

'Bits and pieces.'

'Isn't that sort of hard up here?'

'There's enough. You know, adverts, calendars. Nothing all that good, but it's fun. I even went in for a couple of beauty contests, but it got to be a drag.'

'Beauty contests?'

'Yeah, it's all dumb chicks and red-faced geezers with sweaty hands.'

'Nasty.'

‘Yeah.’

‘Wouldn’t you be better off if you moved to London?’

‘Yeah, I suppose so. I suppose I’ll move down there in the end. It’s just easier up here, you know, we get all the groups and that. There’s less competition.’

‘You’ve got the scene up here pretty well sussed out?’

She grinned.

‘You could say that. I suppose it’s a case of big fish in a little pond. London’d be like starting all over again.’

Before I could say anything else, there was an interruption from the bar. Connie wanted to know if I wanted another drink.

‘Sure, brandy. Get him to put three in a glass, and another for the young lady. Oh, and make sure he puts plenty of ice in mine, okay?’

Connie touched his forelock.

‘Yes guy.’

Jerry leaned over.

‘You’re a terrible fucking consumer.’

‘Fuckin’ right man. Get it while you can.’

‘That’s terrible man, what about the undeveloped countries, man?’

I swallowed some brandy.

‘This wouldn’t do them any good. Brandy on an empty stomach can give you ulcers.’

‘What about poverty, man?’

Poverty, man? Poverty is God’s way of punishing people for being stupid.’

‘You’re nothing but a running dog lackey of Wall Street.’

‘Commie pervert scum.’ It was horseplay time.

‘Class traitor.

‘Pinko faggot’

‘Up against the wall motherfucker.’

‘Go back to Russia.’ Connie joined in.

‘You two are full of shit.’

‘Shut your mouth you little worm.’ ‘Dirty little degenerate.’

Connie stood up and the game turned Irish.

‘Nobody talks to Liam O’Flaherty like that.’

Jerry lurched towards Connie waving a bottle.

‘Oi’ll fight any bastard in this fucking bar.’

He slumped into a chair, dropped the bottle, and became pantomime maudlin.

‘Bastards, they’re fucking bastards, just like the fucking bastard British, they’re all fucking bastards.’

He let his head flop on to the table with a thump, and we all broke up laughing. We were still laughing when one of the businessmen weaved across the room and stood beside where Jerry lay across the table. He stood for a moment trying to focus, and then he prodded Jerry’s shoulder.

‘Listen sonny. I don’t mind people having a bit of fun, but I’d be obligated if you’d keep the language down.’

There was a long pause. We sat quiet, waiting to see what Jerry would do. For a while he just lay there like he was dead, then he snapped bolt upright and stared straight into the man’s face.

‘WHAT?’

‘I’m just asking you, reasonably, to keep your language down.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s starting to annoy me. You may not care, you and your

friends, but we've got ladies with us.

Jerry leaped to his feet and marched across the bar.

'Is that so. Ladies. Let's have a look at these ladies.'

The man grabbed Jerry's arm, but Jerry pushed him away and he sat down heavily in a convenient chair. As Jerry came up to their table, the man's companion stood up.

'Listen lad, I don't...'

'Shut up! I've just come to look at these ladies that we seem to have offended.'

Jerry leaned on the table and stared at the two hookers.

'Wow... oh wow! How could I have used bad language in front of two such beautiful creatures.'

The first businessman had managed to climb to his feet and then reeled back to where his buddy stood staring perplexedly at Jerry's back. Jerry meanwhile had started putting on the hookers.

'I bet you're both models, right?'

The hookers shrieked and giggled.

'Or maybe you're actresses, haven't I seen you on television?'

The businessman tried to reassert himself.

'Listen lad, I've had enough of...'

Jerry flashed a glance at him. It was straight out of an Elvis movie.

'Then sod off, I'm talking with the ladies.'

The rest of us gathered round, and the businessmen began to realize that they were outclassed both in age and numbers. Jerry began to get really outrageous.

'Listen, how about you coming upstairs, any of us are probably a better fuck than your mates here.'

Again the shrieks and giggles, but before Jerry could go any further, the barman pushed his way through us.

'If there's any trouble I'll have to shut the bar.'

Mac started to cool things out. He put an arm round the barman.

'It's okay, just send up a couple of bottles of Scotch and we'll split to our rooms.'

Jerry straightened up.

'Sure, let's split.'

He winked at the whores.

'You coming then?'

It was too much for the drunks. One of them raised his arm as though he was going to hit Jerry, but before he could throw a punch, Jerry grabbed him by the lapels, Humphrey Bogart style.

'Listen little man, if you so much as speak to me again I'll push your shit eating face all the way down to your feet.'

Then he grinned, it was an unpleasant sight.

'Got it?'

Upstairs in Connie's room, the dope and the downers came out and we passed through into the horizontal stage. There seemed to be nothing left to do but take drugs and drink. The radio and TV had both gone off the air hours before, and the only thing we could listen to was the air conditioning. I lay on the floor cuddled up to Lenore and stared at the featureless ceiling while the joint and bottles went round. There was the regular nightly repetition of how we ought to get a cassette player to take on gigs with us, and for the fiftieth time we resolved to go out and get one in the morning.

Sleep was impossible. The booze and a couple of mandies had slowed me down some, but

inside the fuzzy cocoon they created, the speed still kept my brain ticking. I thought about taking some more and making a night of it, but I rejected that idea. I was physically very tired, and if I waited a few hours longer, and maybe took another couple of downers, I might drop off.

Lenore wriggled beside me and reminded me that she was still there, and probably waiting for the reward after all her hard work. That was going to be another problem. I had done so much meth over the past couple of days that I had grave doubts as to whether I could get enough of a hard on to be able to ball her. I'd have to work that out when the time came. It was hardly worth getting paranoid about, although it did seem like a kind of defeat.

A movement from the other side of the room diverted my attention from the ceiling. Mac had got his acoustic guitar out of its case and was cradling it in one of the nasty G-plan armchairs. He started to play softly. Only Jerry, Connie and I had pulled birds and it was understandable that he was looking for something to do.

Jerry raised his head.

'Who do you think you are, man? Fucking Pedro the wandering gypsy. Play something we can sing, man, this scenes's really fucking boring, and Chas ain't even back yet.'

'What d'you want to sing?'

'Dunno, anything. Hang on.'

Jerry picked up the phone by the bed.

'Let's get some more supplies... Hello, room service, this is three seventeen. Could we have a plate of sandwiches, about, I dunno, a dozen say? What? Yeah, ham'll do, make it half ham and half cheese, and a bottle of Chivas Regal... What do you mean you don't have...? Okay, that'll have to do. Yeah, okay.'

He hung up, and slapped the chick he was with on the behind.

'Wake up darling, the party hasn't even started yet.'

Mac began to play quietly. The riff was familiar, then he started to sing over the top.

I don't like you, but I love you.

Jerry and Connie joined in, trying to sound like the Miracles.

Seems that I'm always thinking of you.

I sat up and made an attempt at the high part.

Oh oh oh you treat me badly.

I love you madly.

You really got a hold on me.

You really got a hold on me.

You really got a hold on me.

I tried to make the really high part, failed miserably, and everyone fell about Then there was a knock on the door and a waiter wheeled in a trolley with our stuff on it. After he had split Jerry took the guitar, and upped the tempo a bit with a kind of Chuck Berry riff.

Well she got her daddy's car and grooves to the hamburger stand now.

She forgot about the library like she told her old man now

And with the radio blastin' goes cruising as fast as she can now.

And she'll have

We all came in with a five part harmony on the chorus.

Fun, fun, fun, 'til her daddy takes the T-Bird away.

This time Connie tried the high oo-wee-oo bit and did a lot better than I had.

We were well into the second verse when the door opened. We'd forgotten to lock it when the waiter left.

We all froze, expecting the worst.

'What is this, the campfire sing song?'

'Chas!'

Our alarm systems stopped jangling as Chas, Derek and some chick walked in.

'So where's the rude party, I thought you'd have the whips and the rubber sheets out by now?'

'We was laid low by drink.'

'Aah.'

'Where's the gear?'

'In the truck with Mike.'

'Where's Mike?'

'He took off with some scrubber, he'll be back by noon at the Latest.'

'Wanna drink then?'

'Fucking right I do.'

Chas poured whisky down his throat, coughed and passed the bottle to Derek.

'So what's going on then?'

He gestured towards the girl who came with him.

'I promised this young wench a dirty rock and roll star party and what do I find, a fucking glee club.'

Jerry put down the guitar and stood up.

That's terrible, Chas, we can't have the nice lady disappointed.'

Jerry had that look that usually meant things were going to get weird. I decided to sit and let it happen. The chances were that it was just what Lenore wanted anyway, and if Jerry started on one of his scenes, it would save me the necessity of having to entertain her on my own.

He stood in front of the girl, clasped his hands behind his back and inclined his head in a parody of some kind of Victorian Sir Jasper villain.

'What's your name, little girl?' She giggled.

'Wendy, kind sir.'

Not having a moustache to twirl, he stroked his chin.

'Wendy hmmm. Well Wendy, I'll expect you'll want to get the party started?'

'Um . . . yeah.'

'Right then. Get your clothes off.'

Her eyebrows shot up.

'What?'

'Strip off. That's what you came up here for; wasn't it? Sexy rock 'n' roll fun?'

'I came up here with Chas.'

'To fuck? Right?'

Wendy's face took on a tight look, not exactly a blush, but almost.

'Well ... okay, yes, I suppose so.'

Jerry smiled, like a teacher who's just got through to a slow pupil.

'Okay then, all that's happening is that we're doing it together. We're a famous rock and roll band, you don't expect us to all trot off to our own rooms and fuck with the lights off, do you? Ain't you ever been the guest of a famous rock and roll band before?'

Jerry flashed a glance towards where I was sitting. At first I thought it was me, then I felt Lenore moving beside me. I glanced at her, and there she was looking at Wendy, all smug and superior. I realized that Jerry's glance had been directed at her, and I grinned inwardly at the way he was setting up Lenore at the same time as putting Wendy through. Lenore responded right on cue, she just had to act like the big time groupie in front of the other chick. Before the night was out Jerry would probably turn it back on her.

He stepped across to the light switch.

'Tell you what, darling.'

He still hadn't finished with Wendy.

‘I’ll turn off the main light so it’s a bit more subdued for you. Okay? That’ll make it easier.’

With the centre light off the room was lit by only a small bedside light. The figures sitting around cast dark pits of shadow. Connie got up and hung a red scarf over the light fixture, and it became a dim sinister red. Jerry looked round.

‘That’s even better.’

He went back to his chair and sat down, like Nero presiding over the festivities.

‘Okay Wendy. Get on with it.’

She looked as though she was maybe going to panic.

‘But why just me?’

Jerry shrugged.

‘Somebody’s got to go first.’

There was a long silence while everybody watched what she was going to do. After a lengthy moment of her doing nothing Jerry’s voice became hard and flat.

‘Listen luv, either get stripped off, or Chas is going to ask you to leave. Right, Chas?’

Chas grinned.

‘No other way, darlin’

‘You’re holding the proceedings up. Dig?’

Slowly her hands went up to the buttons on her coat, and with a look of resignation she began to take it off.

Wendy didn’t get too many points for presentation, she removed her clothes as though she was undressing for a medical. In the dark room, her body seemed exceptionally white as she stood staring at her feet, trying to avoid meeting any of our eyes. Jerry laughed.

‘There, that didn’t hurt a bit, did it? And you’ve got such nice tits. Hasn’t she got nice tits, Chas?’

Chas moved up behind and put his arms around her, each hand cupping one of her breasts.

‘She sure has.’

Chas turned her and pressed her body against him. His hand was very dark against her white buttocks. He lifted her head up till her face came up to meet his, then he kissed her and drew her down on to a space on the bed next to Connie and his chick. Once they were settled, Jerry transferred his attention elsewhere.

He looked down beside his chair at the chick he’d brought with him.

‘How about you, then? I mean Wendy’s getting into it, you’re not going to let the roadie’s chick show you up, are you?’

Lenore suddenly erupted beside me.

‘Course she isn’t.’

Then she grinned down at me.

‘And neither am I.’

She picked up one of the bottles of brandy off the regulation coffee table, with Bette Davis bravado, and swallowed the half inch or so that was left. Then she walked over to where Jerry’s chick was slowly getting to her feet.

‘Come on Chrissie, we’ll show them. Here.’

She handed the other girl a bottle of Scotch. The girl took a drink, and wiped her mouth. It was a rocker chick gesture that was somewhat at odds with her dangling hippy see-through. She put the bottle down, and as she straightened up, Lenore arranged herself in a feet apart stripper pose, and slowly unzipped her dress. Chrissie didn’t have quite the same class but she did at least manage to slip her dress off her shoulders with some degree of sensuality.

Lenore stepped out of her dress and turned round for us to inspect her in her boots, panties and jewellery. She was much too hip to wear a bra, and her breasts were small and fashionable. After going through a complete circle, she winked at me, and then moved towards

Chrissie, who was now also naked to the waist, put her arms around her neck, and kissed her full on the mouth. Jerry led the applause. Lenore looked round the room.

'It seems that, as usual, us girls are doing all the work.'

Jerry laughed.

'Right on.'

It seemed to be a general signal for upheaval. Connie climbed to his feet, pulling his chick after him, and began to take off his shirt. Jerry followed suit, as did Mac, only a little more tentatively, as he didn't have a woman lined up. Steve and Derek remained sitting in a corner grinning, while Chas, already in some disarray, continued to grope Wendy on the bed. I took a drink, and slowly stood up. Lenore picked her way towards me, avoiding one of Jerry's hands that reached out to grab her.

'What's the matter, aren't you joining in?'

'Sure.'

I tugged the Mr Fish top over my head and kicked off my moccasins, then I sank to my knees, burying my face in her stomach. She gave a little shudder, and rubbed one of her booted legs against my chest. Then I gently pulled her down on top of me.

Once on the floor, her hand immediately crawled inside my trousers, and we lay for a while kissing and fumbling. I eased my fingers inside her panties by way of a reciprocal gesture.

Our comparative privacy didn't last for long, however. With a crash, Jerry collapsed beside us. Lenore twisted round and began kissing him, although she didn't take her hand out of my pants. Feeling neglected, I crawled on to all fours and reached for a bottle. As I returned with it, Jerry opened his eyes and took his mouth away from Lenore's.

'Listen man, we've really got to get a Polaroid camera.'

I took a swallow from the bottle.

'Call room service.'

He laughed.

'Hello, can you send up like a Polaroid camera, a boy scout uniform and half a dozen cucumbers.'

Lenore giggled loudly, and I was uncomfortably reminded of the hookers in the bar.

Jerry eventually crawled away, it looked as though he was going to check out Connie's chick. I nuzzled up to Lenore's ear.

'Let's split to my room.'

She sat up.

'Okay, but why?'

'There's too many guys and too few chicks in here, I don't want to miss out.'

She leered at me.

'I thought famous rock and roll bands all did it together.'

I started collecting my things.

'You don't want to believe all you read.'

We didn't bother to dress, just gathered our stuff that was laying about and headed for the door, but, before we could get way, Jerry saw us.

'Where are you two going?'

'Some private fucking, I think the meth wore off.'

'Shy or something?'

'Not really, it's just that I might want to run for election some time.'

There was nobody about in the corridor, which was lucky really. I think the sight of the two of us creeping back to our room, Leonore in her boots and knickers and me in just my trousers, could have had a terrible effect on the infirm.

In a moment of foolishness before we fell into bed, I'd hung the pro forma request for

breakfast outside the door instead of the Do Not Disturb sign, and at some god-awful hour like nine-thirty a maid had trundled in with a trolley of bacon, eggs, toast, marmalade and coffee.

For a full five minutes she'd stomped around the room, opening curtains and picking up towels in obvious demonstration of her disapproval of my having an unauthorized woman in bed with me.

After she'd gone, I was forced to get up and close the curtains again, and on the way back to bed I had to pass the breakfast. Unable to resist, and moving like a zombie, I poured myself some coffee, and even went so far as to start picking at the bacon. I nudged Lenore.

'Want some coffee?'

She rolled over and buried her face in the pillow.

'Yeech.'

I lit a cigarette, coughed for a while, and finally stubbed it out on the fried egg. It was one way of getting back at the maid. Then I went back to bed and slept till noon.

As usual, it took three days in bed to recover from the tour, and on the fourth day it was all I could do to totter out for papers and cigarettes.

It was in the tobacconist's that it happened. I was paying the man behind the counter, and a couple of hippies in old army coats were watching me sullenly as I handed over a flyer. There's nothing freaks resent more than other freaks who are conspicuously more affluent.

It was the voice behind me that came as a surprise.

'Lou. Lou Francis.'

I took my time turning round. The novelty of being recognized had long since worn off, and random meetings with fans were now mainly tiresome, but at least the voice was female, so I made an effort to look minimally presentable.

The voice might have been surprising, but what I saw when I turned round was almost a shock.

'Sally! Sally, how are you? It's been years.'

She looked a bit older, but still very attractive. The Bardot pout and the magnificent breasts
were still the same, only her eyes seemed to have aged. They looked harder and more knowing. It was only when she smiled that they softened.

'It's nice to see you, Lou. I hear you're a rock and roll star these days.'

I looked deliberately vague.

'So it would seem. What have you been doing all this time?'

She bought some cigarettes.

'Oh, all kinds of things. It's difficult to know where to start.'

I thought for a moment.

'Listen, are you doing anything right now? Have you got time for a drink?'

She looked at her watch.

'I've got about half an hour, shall we go to the nearest pub?'

It was nearing the end of lunchtime, the crowd in the pub was starting to thin out, and we managed to find a table in a corner. I went to the bar, ordered some drinks, and carried them to where Sally was sitting. Then I took my time settling down, preparing myself for the what-have-you-been-doing conversation.

'So then, what have you been doing?'

It sounded so lame, but I couldn't think of anything better. She laughed.

'Oh, all kinds of things. What was I doing when we last met?'

'You were living in Hampstead, working for a photographer.'

She smiled.

‘God, that was a long time ago. I’ve been through a lot of things since then.’

‘Yeah? What?’

‘Oh, there have been so many things. The photographer didn’t last too long, but he did get me into a bit of modelling.’

‘Fashion or glamour?’

‘Oh, pin-ups, I haven’t got the figure for fashion, too much figure to be precise.’

‘And you’re still doing it?’

‘Christ no, that only lasted for a while. Then I moved in with this forty-year-old lesbian. She was really weird, but for a time she had me completely hypnotised. I even had all my hair cut off, it’s still growing back. It wore off in the end though, and I got this job as a croupier, and started going with this Italian.’

Never a dull moment.’

‘Well, it wasn’t as bad as all that. Mario was into all this kind of playboy thing, you know. It was really good until he started knocking me about. He was always, blacking my eye and things, I don’t know why I stayed around so long.’

‘Maybe you dug it?’

She shook her head.

‘I don’t think so. I’ve never thought of myself as a masochist, but maybe you’re right. I put up with it for a long time.’

I grinned.

‘You never can tell.’

She shrugged. It was pleasing to watch her shrug her shoulders on account of the way her breasts moved as she did it.

‘I don’t know. Anyway, I seem to be doing all the talking. How about you? I suppose you’re rich and famous by now. I keep reading about you and seeing your picture in the papers.’

I swallowed my drink.

‘I dunno, I Suppose I’m famous, a lot of kids seem to know who I am. And we live pretty well, although we ain’t bought any Ferraris or country houses just yet.’

Just then the barman began making all the unpleasant noises that indicated that they were about to close. Sally looked at her watch.

‘Jesus, I’m going to be late if I don’t rush. I’ve got to go and see about this job.’

‘You out of work?’

‘At the moment.’

‘Listen, why don’t you come over to the pad some time soon? We’re not working for a few weeks.’

She nodded and smiled.

‘I’d like that. Where do you live?’

‘Got a bit of paper?’

She fumbled in her bag.

‘Here.’

I scribbled down the address and phone number. She folded it carefully and tucked it in her bag.

‘I’ve got to rush now.’

She kissed me quickly on the cheek.

‘Bye bye.’

‘Yeah, take care. Good luck with the job.’

I watched her hurry out, finished my drink, and then ambled out of the pub myself.

Sally called me the following afternoon, and showed up at the pad the same evening. Jerry

and Connie were both out when she arrived. After she'd taken off her coat, and I poured us both a Scotch, there was a short, awkward silence. We'd filled in our lives from the last time we'd seen each other already, and it was hard to know what to do next. Neither of us wanted to establish whether this meeting was just down to old times, or whether we wanted to get it on again. I tried to start on the level of small talk.

'So did you get the job?'

She made a rueful face and shook her head.

'They didn't think I was strictly suitable.'

'That's a shame.'

'You're not kidding, the dole hardly keeps me in fags.'

'Yeah right. Having money has made me forget about National Assistance and that whole Labour Exchange trip.'

'It's no fun.'

'I believe you.'

I poured her another drink.

'Listen, why don't we go out for something to eat?' She laughed.

'I'm not quite starving yet. I didn't come round looking for famine relief.'

I patted her hand.

'I'm not offering you charity, I'm hungry, and I thought we might go out for a meal. When we come back, you can meet Jerry and Connie. They're two more of the band.'

She stood up.

'Don't get me wrong, I never refuse food.'

'Okay, let's go then.'

We ate at one of those Italian places in Soho that try to give the impression that David Frost and Michael Caine have just left. We took our time over it, and reeled off more small talk, but after coffee and a couple of brandies things began to relax a bit, and a discreet bout of footsie while we waited for the bill seemed to confirm that I was going to get laid that night at least.

It would have been nice and romantic to walk home arm in arm, but it was altogether too cold, and we got a taxi for the short journey.

Back at the pad, Jerry and Connie had returned and were sprawled round the living room with a couple of standard hippie scrubbers, all eye makeup, boots and chiffon, smoking dope and watching the wrestling on TV. Connie looked up as we walked in.

'Wotcha.'

He glanced at Sally.

'Who's this one?'

'Sally, I used to know her years ago.'

'Childhood sweetheart?'

'Not exactly.'

Jerry mumbled something about nice tits, and Sally looked round nervously as the two dollies gave her the cool treatment that strange groupies use on each other. I decided the kindest thing to do was to help her off with her coat and guide her towards a drink and a vacant armchair. I perched on the arm, put my arm round Sally and fell to watching the tag match.

I was still absorbed by the TV when Connie reached over and handed Sally a joint. I looked at her to see how she'd react. One subject our conversation hadn't touched on was drugs. She took the joint, looked at it, hesitated, sucked inexpertly and coughed.

'I'm not used to smoking these things I'm afraid, I usually fall asleep after the first one or two.'

Jerry looked at her balefully. She had obviously lost a lot of points on his card. You could

feel the two scrubbers restraining themselves from laughing. It was a tense social moment when hip snobbery exerted itself to the full. To make matters more difficult the TV shut down at that point, leaving us with no other point of focus but Sally and her social blunder.

Out of some sort of compassion, Connie stood up and started flipping channels on the TV set, cursing out Britain for not having all-night television. The moment passed, but the room was still vaguely uncomfortable. It always seems that way when a lot of dope-fiends find someone in their midst who doesn't use drugs.

To try to alleviate the situation I climbed off the arm of the chair, stretched my legs, and wandered into the kitchen to look for some booze. As luck would have it. there was a bottle of Portuguese rose stashed in the fridge. I hunted for the corkscrew and returned proudly to the living room.

'I found a bottle.'

'Aah, far out.'

'All the glasses were dirty though.'

'Who cares?'

Jerry pointed at the two chicks.

'It's okay, these two can wash up later.'

Their smugness fell away visibly.

'Charming.'

Jerry sneered.

'You might as well make yourselves useful.'

Connie laughed and rolled over to pass on the bottle. This time, Sally had no reservations about accepting. He sat up and fumbled in the pocket of his jacket.

'Anyone want a mandy?'

Jerry and I nodded in unison.

'Sure.'

'Why not?'

Connie handed round the pills, and when the bottle came to me, I glanced at Sally.

'Want one?'

She shook her head.

'No thanks.'

I shrugged

Suit yourself

Jerry suddenly sat up.

'Listen, I got Cornwall all fixed up.'

I was mystified.

'Cornwall?'

'Yeah Cornwall, we all talked about it the last night of the tour. We were going to rent a place in Cornwall to rehearse and party over Christmas.'

Dimly it all came back to me.

'Oh yeah, right. So what's happening?'

'Well, I went up to Jimmy's office today, and it's all together. There's two cars rented, Chas is going to bring down the gear we need in the truck, and we got this house that's miles from anywhere. All we've got to do is pick up the stuff we need for Christmas, you know, pud and turkey. Pat's even fixed up for us to rent a TV and a stereo.'

'Sounds good.'

'We can order all the food we need from Fortnums.'

'Fortnum's! Get him. What's wrong with Tesco's?'

'I just fancied Fortnum's.'

Connie looked at Jerry enquiringly.

‘What’s the state of affairs at the moment?’

‘Okay, I think. I didn’t go into too much detail. There seems to be about four grand in the bank after all the bills for the tour are in, and Pat said we should get some more bread from the record company in the new year.’

I grinned

‘That sounds fine to me.’

Connie still looked thoughtful.

‘I sometimes wonder if we shouldn’t keep a closer eye on what’s going on. We could get ripped off for a bundle the way things are, and never even notice.’

Jerry stretched.

‘It’s too much hassle chasing round checking up on things all the time. As long as the money keeps on coming, I’m happy.’

‘Maybe.’

The Mandrax was starting to come on, and for the moment I was inclined to agree with Jerry. I was also more interested in the trip to Cornwall.

‘When are we going to leave?’

Jerry looked blank.

‘Leave?’

‘For Cornwall.’

‘Oh that. A few days before Christmas Eve, I suppose.’

‘And who’s going to come?’

‘Well, all the band, Derek, Chas, Eddie, Mike. Jimmy may come down for a couple of days. And some chicks, I suppose.’

‘We ought to invite Shane.’

‘Who’s Shane?’

‘This dealer I know.’

‘Sure.’

Connie sat up.

‘Hey listen, who’s going to look after us? I mean cooking and that. There ain’t no room service out in the wilds.’

Jerry waved his hand airily.

‘The chicks I suppose, and Chas. Chas cooks real good. We’ll sort it out.’

I stood up and went for a piss. I could feel that the mandies were starting to make my legs go rubbery. Back in the living room, I suggested to Sally that maybe we should retire to my bedroom, and she agreed. As we were bidding everyone good night, Jerry glanced up at Sally.

‘Why don’t you come to Cornwall with us?’ She looked at me.

‘Is that all right with you, Lou?’ ‘Sure. If you want to.’

I felt sure she’d refuse, but amazingly she said yes.

‘I might even cook for you.’

‘Great.’

As we headed for the bedroom, I was certain that Jerry would put her through some kind of mind snapper before the holiday was through, but if she wanted to come with us, I wasn’t about to stop her.

I closed the bedroom door. Sally began to undress straight away. It seemed that drugs was the only part of her education that was missing.

‘It’s going to be strange, us fucking after such a long time.’

She smiled, and cupped one of her breasts with her hand.

‘We’re probably both a great deal better at it.’

The next hour proved that she was absolutely right She was incredible, totally without any

inhibitions about her body She gave and received without hesitation. The lesbian, the Italian and all the others that I knew nothing about seemed to have done her nothing but good. Taking her to Cornwall became a much more pleasing prospect.

Afterwards, as we lay quietly together in the semi-darkness, she propped herself up on one elbow and looked at me very solemnly.

'You've changed.'

'So have you. That was incredible.'

'No seriously, not just sex. Your attitudes have changed.'

'Yeah? Is that good or bad?'

'I don't know. This afternoon I was aching to go to bed with you. It all came back, the way I used to love you...'

'But now you're not so sure?'

'It's nothing as clear as that. It's more like I fancy you, like you were almost someone new. I don't know what I really feel. I suppose only time will sort it out.'

There's a point in every rock and roll show where it takes a dip. It's just after the middle, the time when the swaggering opening has dissipated itself, and the crowd, even if they are dancing about, have, one way or another, settled down to dig the show. They've become maybe thirty-five minutes used to you. It's like the middle of screwing, the fun of starting is over, and the rush at the end hasn't begun. It's the time when you have to grind out the maximum effort. The period when it actually becomes work.

Things aren't going badly. The crowd is on its feet and jumping, Jerry's jumping, I'm jumping, Mac's lurching, Steve is rigid and Connie's arms are thrashing at the drums like pistons. It's not just a gig, it's a good one, despite the dumb broad in the Jean Harlow silver lamé and all her bullshit about the moon being in Scorpio, and how that presaged death and disaster. It's just that right at this point the jumps and lurches get calculated. You've got to drive yourself until you get caught up in the run for home.

Jean Harlow in the dressing room was one thing I didn't need. It was maybe her that had me shook while I was listening to Beethoven when we were waiting to get on.

I turn and yell at Jerry. I don't use the mike, because he has a dislike of shouts and yells in the middle of his solo which I tend to respect. There's no sound at all, not even inside my head, and I wonder if I really shouted or just opened and shut my mouth.

I'm trying to get away from that stupid chick and her moor in Scorpio bullshit. We used to play games with death and destruction. Even when the first letters began to roll in, 'I'm going to get you, Lou Francis', we thought it was a great joke It was only later that it began to cast a shadow.

I mince to the front of the stage and wave myself at the audience, swing round and go back again. Jerry is starting to pull things to a close. I move up to the mike.

It ain't directed
It ain't aimed
It ain't right to be ashamed
Please believe that isn't true
Believe me baby
It ain't, it ain't
Believe that isn't really true.

Thumpty, thumb, crash, crash. Finish, and they're cheering.

I never much liked that song, but it's more a vehicle for Jerry's guitar, and I live with it.

'Rockin' on?'

Cheer.

'Right.'

A look round at the others. *Take You Down?*

They nod. Jerry counts it in. It's slow and nasty, and I move the mike stand right up to the footlights. Everything dims and they hit me with a spotlight. I clasp both hands over the mike and hunch my shoulders. Let their little maternal hearts go out to me.

If the weirdo's sitting out there nursing his gun and his hate, this is the song for him.

Let me take you down
Down beneath the troubles in your dreams.
Let me take you down
Down below the level of your schemes.
I'm twenty-five cents shy of this bottle

And my coat is wearing thin
If you help me on to my next drink
I'll ask no other thing.
Let me take you down
Down beneath the sorrows that you find.
Let me take you down
Down below your squalid little mind.

Another spotlight hits Jerry, and the guitar slides between the verses like a surgeon's knife. The two spotlights seem to hold us like isolated puppets.

I don't have all those regrets about the thing 1 do
And if I hide here long enough I'll do it once to you.
You know the pain comes on so sweet
Sets you walking on my line.
You'll howl your horror afterwards -
But you won't try to define.
Let me take you down
Through the bottom of your cosy insulation. Let me take you down

To a land where there is no consolation.

Again the guitar slices in, and then draws back, complaining to itself like some monstrous dog having a bad dream.

Let me take you down.

The guitar shudders in an anguished seventies approximation of John Lee Hooker's *Stop Him.*

Let me take you down.

Call and response, the voice and the electronic beast commune with each other.

Let me take you down babe.

The guitar shrieks.

Right down.

Scream.

Right down in the dark land.

Hesitate, crash.

Where they're chained in shadows.

Crash-crash-crash.

God help me!

The guitar sighs.

Waiting in the shadows.

It's just a whisper.

Waiting — just for you.

There is a moment of silence, then Connie starts tapping his snare drum, quickly and quietly. Jerry's guitar starts again, very soft and plaintive. I drop to my knees as though exhausted. It's not hard to fake.

Jerry moves slowly towards where I'm kneeling on the stage, until our two spotlights touch. My hands are clasped behind the back of my neck, like those news pictures of captured Viet Cong. Jerry stands over me holding his guitar like a machine gun. Slowly and carefully he raises his right arm. I watch him out of the corner of my eye. We've done this routine all through the tour, but I'm never really sure what he might do. I also have to take my cue from him.

A long plaited leather thong hangs down from the band on his wrist. There is a small, silver mounted piece of turquoise at the tip. There have been rumours in the smart New York faggot gossip papers that he beats women with it. The rumours became perfectly true ever since they

appeared in print and the queue formed.

Suddenly he whips his arm down at his guitar, and I jackknife into the air. The band erupts. It's hard and fast, driving along. The audience are slapped out of their trance. I grab the mike stand, almost as though I'm attacking, strangling it.

Let me take you down
Down, down, down to the end of the line.
A lithe way down past the danger sign
Far below the frightened herds
Out of reach of soothing words.
Second class ticket to the first degree
Baby won't you come with me
Join the party, meet the lost
Feel the pain and count the cost
Check the numbers, keep the score
Still think you can take some more
Let me take you down now
Let me take you down
Let me na-na take down down
Down, down baby, down, down, down.
Let me, oh God
1 can feel it.
Let me take you, feel it too
Let me take you down
Let me take you down.

I stagger across the stage and sag against a speaker, then jerk back towards the mike.

Make it, fake it, you can't break it
Gonna take you down.

'Did you ever get into Hitler?'

'Hunh?'

'Did you ever get into Hitler?'

There had been one of those long, silences in the drive to Cornwall. All the way from Exeter to Plymouth everyone ii our car had lapsed into a contented silence while Chuck Berry jangled out of the cassette machine.

Jerry was picking at his fingernails with a flick-knife. We had found a shop when we'd been in Paris a few weeks earlier t record a TV show. Everyone except Steve had bought one and, after smuggling them back to England, Jerry had played with his incessantly.

We were doing the trip to Cornwall, in convoy. There was Chas in the truck that carried the instruments and gear that w wanted with us. Then there was Mac, Steve, Eddie and three chicks in the first car, while in the second car there was Derek Shane the dealer, Shane's mate and two more chicks. Connie Jerry, Sally, Ruth, some chick Jerry had found and I were crammed into the third car, with Mike driving.

The bravado of racing each other and jockeying for position had worn itself out by the time we'd got to Exeter, and journey fatigue had set in, accentuated by Mandrax all round and whole lot of joints. Sally had come round to a position of taking token hits of whatever was going, and life had settled down to a fairly even tenor. In the hot cramped car, I had even started to feel vaguely horny about the idea of having Sally to myself for a week or so after all this time.

It took Jerry's remark about Hitler to break the genera languor. Connie, who was in the

front seat, twisted round t look at him.

'What about Hitler?'

'Hitler was pretty weird.'

'What do you mean weird? Everyone knows he was weird.'

'I was reading this book about him, I never sussed just how weird he was.'

'Yeah? How?'

'Well, for a start, he had his horoscope faked.'

'You're kidding?'

'No really, his official birth chart was put forward by twenty minutes to change it from predicting he was going to fuck up, to making him out to be a glorious hero.'

'Oh what!'

'Yeah, and he also had this doctor, a cat called Morrell. This Morrell was a complete quack who rowed in with all these top Nazis by peddling them these miracle cures.'

'How come they didn't suss him out?'

'He got them all strung out on junk. He was shooting up Hitler with a mixture of coke. smack, methedrine and belladonna. He called them vitamin injections.'

'Fuck, you could turn anyone into Hitler with a mixture like that.'

Connie laughed.

'Where can I score some?'

The chick who had come with Jerry interrupted the general laughter.

'I heard about a similar cat like that who was supposed to have hung around with the Kennedys.'

'Similar to what?'

'Similar to this cat Morrell. He was called…. er...'

She paused and thought.

'No, it's no good, I can't remember the guy's name. Anyway, he was this speedfreak quack who thought that methedrine was the solution to all the world's problems. He came on a bit like Leary, only he had this thing about speed, and apparently he was taken up by the Kennedys and used to hang around jacking them all up with various kinds of amphetamine mixture. It seems he was with John F. Kennedy all through the Cuba crisis, right at the time he was threatening to start tossing missiles about, and Kennedy was stoned out on speed all through it.'

'You're joking?'

'No, that was the way I heard it. I mean, I'm not sure if it's true or not, but it sounds sort of convincing.'

We went on trading the great dope-fiend paranoia legends for the next half hour. It ranged through how the moon landings were filmed in the Warner Brothers back lot, through aliens having taken over the FBI, and Walt Disney being frozen until they discovered immortality, right through to the X-rays that were beamed into the great pyramid and never came out again.

'Did you ever hear about the Eleven?'

'What are the Eleven, for Christ's sake?'

'They're these eleven super intellects who are supposed to control the world. They're supposed to live in some remote part of the Himalayas.'

'I heard about them, they're supposed to be in contact with people from space, and they've infiltrated and taken over every government in the world.'

'That's the ones. Apparently there was this guy who put together a book about them, but before he could get it into print, he was murdered, and the manuscript vanished.'

Eventually we exhausted the believe it or not fantasies, and after the appropriate chorus of 'fucking weird', a couple of joints went round the car and the comfortable crowded silence

was resumed. It wasn't broken until the cars in front turned into the forecourt of a pub. We all climbed out of the car, stretched our cramped legs and trooped into the pub.
There were only a couple of rustics, nursing pints in a corner of the public bar. They radiated hard hostility as the crew of freaks filled the place with an instant crowd. Our entrance had overtones of an invasion of the wild ones, particularly as Jerry milked the situation for all it was worth, banging his boots on the wooden floorboards like a sound track for an Italian western.

The hostility of the yokels was repeated when the landlord appeared to serve us. He was reaching for the 'No beatniks' sign, when Eddie asked for a double bourbon. He thought better of it, and when he found that the first round came to well over a flyer he changed his attitude completely.

We stayed in the pub until closing time, and then stocked up on bottles for the rest of the journey. The delay pushed back our arrival in Cornwall to after the darkness had begun to close in. It was brought home to us that finding a cottage in the middle of nowhere was very different from looking for an address in a numbered and well lighted street.
The phone number was in the Penzance area, and after a meeting in a layby we decided that the best thing was to drive into the centre of the town and try to find directions to the village where the cottage was.

There was a freezing wind blowing in off the sea, and the streets of Penzance were all but deserted. For fifteen minutes we drove round in what must have looked like some kind of sinister convoy, looking for someone to ask.

When we finally found one, he almost died of fright when our three cars and a truck screamed to a stop beside him.

Connie leaned out of the window.

'Do you know a place called St Rube?'

'Aay?'

'St Rube, do you know how we can get to St Rube?'

Where?'

'St Rube.'

There was a long silence while he thought about it.

'Sorry, I don't know it.'

He scurried off as Jerry got out of the car in front.

'Did you find out where we're going?'

'Stupid old git had never heard of it.'

'We'd better ask a copper.'

'Is that wise? He might start a panic that there's an international dope dealers' convention in some lonely village.'

'Come on, there's nothing to worry about, they're all half asleep down here.'

Jerry wound down the back window.

'I never had any aggravation all the time I lived down here. Ask a copper and let's get there. I don't intend to spend the night in the fucking car.'

Connie turned round in his seat.

'We could always check into a hotel for the night, and look for the cottage in the morning.'

'Ah fuck off, let's try to find it, I'm pissed off with this journey.'

It took us another ten minutes of cruising round town to find a policeman. He, at least, gave us fairly lucid directions, and we headed back into the country. After the very minimum of wrong turns and backtracking we finally arrived in St Rube.

To call St Rube a village was a gross exaggeration. The only way it qualified was in that it had one cottage for every square mile, rather than one for every five which seemed to be rule for the surrounding countryside. It took us a solid hour of stumbling down lanes and dirt

tracks by the light of a torch before we finally located our cottage.

By way of a consolation, the word cottage was an under-statement. It was in fact about four cottages knocked into one, so it was large, with a generous number of rooms.

When we'd finally got ourselves and possessions out of the car, we stood in what seemed to be the main living room of the place and looked around. The walls were of thick Cornish granite, while the ceilings were low with wooden beams. The furniture, if sparse, was old and fitted in with the place exactly.

'We can put the TV and the stereo in here.'

'That's a really beautiful fireplace. A great roaring fire'd be too much.'

One wall was taken by a huge fireplace, formed by heavy granite slabs that surrounded a space big enough to stand up in.

'You could burn half a tree in that.'

Connie looked at it dubiously.

'I don't fancy spending all my time chopping trees.'

Eddie looked up from plugging in the stereo.

'We don't have to. I arranged with the people we rented it from to lay in a good stock of coal and logs. They should be in some outhouse somewhere.'

He began connecting up the speakers.

'I'll have a look round when I've finished this, and try to get a fire going.'

Jerry opened a door.

'Let's see what the rest of the place looks like.'

The door led to a flight of stairs and we all followed Jerry up them. There was a long corridor at the top, which the conversion job made twist and turn. We poked our heads into the bedrooms that led off it. They again were sparsely but adequately furnished. It was all very pleasing.

When we'd finished inspecting the upstairs, we came back into what had been designated as the living room. Eddie was working on the fire, and Chas was helping him. Jerry still seemed intent on exploring.

'What do we have through here?'

'Kitchen.'

The kitchen had the same kind of farmhouse furniture, but there were also a service cooker and fridge. The main feature, however, was a huge rough wood table, big enough to seat ten, that looked like something out of the Vikings. Connie flopped into a chair at the head of the table.

'This is a bit of all right.'

'Most feudal.'

Steve opened a door at the opposite side of the kitchen.

'There's another big room in here.'

'Yeah?'

We all walked over to take a look. It was almost a duplicate of the living room except for the fireplace which, in this instance, had been blocked up.

'We could set up the gear in here. Use the other room and the kitchen for hanging out and keep this one to blow in. How about that?'

We all nodded.

'Sure.'

'We don't have any hassles with moving gear when we want to party.'

'Let's get the lads to move all the stuff out of the truck then.'

Chas bitched a bit when we laid it on him.

'Why don't we leave it in the truck till morning?'

'Best to bring it inside now.'

Eventually he shrugged, and very soon he, Mike, Derek and Eddie were manhandling in the pieces of equipment.

There was a roaring fire in the living room and Jerry had persuaded a couple of the chicks to make some tea. Things were starting to get quite homely. The dope came out, and Mac fetched the booze in from the car.

'We're going to have to fetch in some more drink tomorrow.'

'There's a couple of packs of beer in the fridge with the groceries.'

'That should see us through the night. We can take a ride into town in the morning.'

'Fuck the morning, what are we going to do tonight?'

Steve yawned.

'I don't see much else to do but go to bed. I'm knackered after the journey down.'

'That's no way to start a fucking holiday.'

'I don't see us getting too much of a party going tonight, and it's too late to start playing music.'

After another half hour of sitting round drinking and smoking joints even Jerry was ready to admit that we were all really too tired to get anything together, and, starting with Steve, one by one everyone began to drift off to claim bedrooms and crash out. Then there was Shane, Jerry and his chick, Sally and myself left round the fire. *Visions of Johanna* was on the stereo, and I found myself starting to nod. I thought vaguely that I could drop half a Dexedrine and stay up a while longer, but it didn't seem to be any more appealing than going off to bed with Sally. In the end it was she that settled it by taking bold of my hand.

'I'm getting awfully tired, Lou.' Jerry grinned nastily.

'Looks like she wants you to perform, Lou.'

Sally shot him a poisonous glance, but said nothing. I flashed on how Jerry's humour could become a real menace before the holiday was over. The best thing to do for the moment seemed to be to cool things out. I stood up.

'Shall we go to bed then?'

Sally nodded.

'Okay.'

I glanced at Jerry, who had gone back to staring into the fire.

'See you later.'

He raised his hand.

'Sure man, have a good sleep.'

We climbed the stairs, and found ourselves a room. It was cold, and even though there was an electric fire which I turned on as soon as we were in the room, we were forced to undress quickly and jump into bed shivering.

Cold and tiredness took its toll on our screwing, and it was all too brief and mechanical to be really satisfying. I hugged Sally close to me.

'I'm sorry, it'll be better later.'

She kissed me.

'Don't worry, pet. Let's get some sleep, I'm exhausted.'

Just as I was drifting into unconsciousness I felt Sally raise her head.

'Lou?'

'Yeah.'

'Are you asleep?'

I sighed and rolled over

Not quite'

'I'm afraid I don't like Jerry.'

'Jerry?'

'He seems to have this thing about making me look stupid.'

‘I wouldn’t take any notice, he does that to everyone. I think it’s his way of checking them out.’

‘He really hates women, doesn’t he?’

‘Hates women? He certainly gets through enough of them.’

‘The fact that he has them doesn’t mean he likes them.’

In the summer, you could have called the countryside around St Rube wild and beautiful, but in midwinter it was simply bleak. A wide expanse of hillside covered in gorse and scrub broken only by outcroppings of ragged grey rocks. In the distance you could see a grey strip of the sea, distinguishable from sky only by being a more greenish shade of grey.

The wind blew relentlessly and hugged my leather jacket tighter around my shoulders. Apart from Chas, who was tinkering around with the gear, I was the first one up. There seems to be something about the first night in a strange place that always makes me wake early. I had left Sally asleep and decided to go for a walk.

Briskly, I had set off up the hill, but after about ten minutes I was puffing and blowing. I realized how out of condition one could become living in a city on a diet of drugs.

I sat down on a rock and looked down at the cottage. The lonely building, and cars parked outside, reminded me of one of those news photographs of Mafia summit conferences in lonely Appalachian hideouts. I got up, and went on labouring up the hill. At the top, I saw that the next valley was almost identical to the one behind me.

A figure was coming towards me up the track. As it came closer I saw it was what looked like a farm labourer, stained grey suit, wellingtons and a shotgun under his arm. He had the brown wrinkled skin of a man who had spent all his life in the open air. A black labrador loped along at his side.

I stood still and waited for him to draw level with me. The dog saw me and barked, but he shushed it.

‘Mornin’.

The greeting took me completely by surprise. The city dweller cultivates an incredible isolation.

‘Good morning.’

He paused about six feet from me, and gestured towards the cottage.

‘You stayin’ there?’

I nodded.

‘That’s right, just over Christmas.’

‘Oh aye.’

He digested the piece of information.

‘Have a good time then.’

He walked off down the hillside, the dog shot me a backward glance and then followed him. I watched them go, and then walked down the path back to the cottage.

The kitchen was a hive of activity. Only Mac and his chick were still in bed. Sally and Ruth were hustling round making bacon sandwiches while Jerry and Shane sat at the table rolling joints. They all looked at me as I walked in.

‘Jesus man, what are you, Davy Crockett?’

‘I just thought I’d have a look round. I met some old country guy with his dog.’

‘Fraternizing with the natives.’

‘Public relations, mate. It never does any harm.’

‘You want to watch the intrepid pioneer bit though. You might get eaten by bears.’

‘There aren’t any bears in Cornwall.’

‘You can’t be too careful.’

‘Okay, okay, enough of the jokes, do I get any coffee?’

Sally looked up from the cooker.
'If you hang on for a minute, I'll get you one.'
Connie came in from the rehearsal room.
'What are we going to do today?
Ruth sat down at the table.
'We need booze, cigarettes and a whole lot more groceries.'
Steve looked up from the comic he was reading.
'I could get behind having a blow some time today.' Connie nodded.
'So could I.'
'Maybe if the band stayed here and the rest went into town for the day.'
'That sounds okay.'
'Sure, suits me.'
Jerry's chick, whose name had turned out to be Di, draped a languid arm round Jerry's shoulder.
'I'd like to stay here and hear the band.'
Jerry shot her a glance of vague irritation.
'Okay fine, and Chas better hang on in case we need anything doing to the gear.'
Eddie looked round.
'Anybody else not want to go into town?' Sally looked at me.
'Shall I go into town or stay here?'
'You might as well go with the others, there won't be too much going on here.'
'Okay then.'
Eddie stood up.
'We'd better take two cars. Mike, do you want to drive the other car?'
Mike nodded, and there was a flurry of rushing about as the ones who were going to go, got themselves together for the trip.
After they'd gone, the seven of us sat round the table, opened some beers and passed round three or four joints. At last, after we'd been sitting there for ages, gradually becoming less and less mobile, Connie lurched to his feet.
'Are we going to do something, or are we just going to sit here all day?'
'We've got to get Mac up before we can start doing anything.'
Steve grinned.
'I'm quite happy sitting here.' Jerry climbed out of his chair.
'Okay then, I suppose we better get down to it.' He turned to Connie.
'If you get Mac out of bed, we'll check out the gear.'
'You get him up, I want to sort out my drums.'
Jerry was taken aback by Connie's flash of anger. He shrugged.
'Suit yourself.'
He wandered off in the direction of the stairs. The rest of us followed Connie into the practice room. An air of tension had sprung up like a freak storm, and there was a kind of embarrassment between us as we fiddled with the gear and the instruments. Mac came in in a T-shirt and jeans, scratching himself.
'What the fuck's the matter with Jerry?'
Before we could explain what had happened, Jerry followed Mac through the door, and there was a tense silence while he plugged in his guitar and tuned. He looked round at us defensively.
'Are we going to do something then?'
Mac fiddled with the tuning of his Fender.
'Sure, sure. Let's do a quick twelve bar to get warmed up.'
We lumbered into something that sounded vaguely like *Dust My Broom,* but nobody

seemed to be putting much heart into it. I didn't even bother to sing, and after about four verses Connie brought the whole thing to a perfunctory stop. Nobody said anything. Mac stared at the floor, Jerry lit a cigarette,

Steve played a disjointed riff on his bass, while Connie tapped at his drums without any particular rhythm.

Di, sensing the atmosphere, got up from where she'd been sitting in the corner.

'I think I'll go and have a bath.'

Jerry looked up from his amp.

'Yeah, do that. There's nothing happening here.'

Steve sighed.

'Listen, let's make some kind of effort to pull this thing into shape. There's at least three songs that could do with tightening up.'

Connie shrugged.

'Yeah, anything. There's nothing on telly yet.'

Jerry flashed round on him.

'What's the matter with you then, man? You so good you don't have to rehearse?'

Connie's mouth twisted into a sneer.

'The way things stand, the kids'd cheer anything we play.'

'And I suppose that's good enough for you, is it?'

Connie began to go red.

'That's right man. I'm just in it for the money and fucking, anything's good enough for me.'

Mac made an attempt to cool things off.

'Neither of you mean all this, so let's stop it before it gets out of hand.'

Connie turned on him angrily.

'Don't tell me to stop it. Save it for Jerry flicking Deacon. He's the one who seems to think we're all his fucking backing group.'

Jerry looked furious.

'Fucking bullshit, man. If somebody didn't push this fucking band we wouldn't get anything together.'

Connie jumped to his feet, and stood glaring at Jerry as though he was about to hit him.

'Maybe your fucking band'd get together better if it had another fucking drummer.'

He swung round and stalked out of the room, leaving us all staring at each other, totally speechless. Steve finally broke the silence.

'Maybe we'd better go and talk to him.'

Jerry shook his head.

'I'd better go and talk to him alone. It's the only way to get it sorted out.'

'Do you think that's wise?'

'Yeah, it's got to be settled. This moody's down to something between him and me.'

Mac leaned his guitar against his amp and turned.

'Okay, go talk to him. We ain't going to be able to do anything until the two of you have worked something out.'

Jerry unstrapped his guitar.

'I'll go talk to him, give me a half hour.'

Jerry went after Connie, and the rest of us wandered into the kitchen and sat round the table.

'This is getting silly.'

'Ahh, give Jerry a chance to work it out. Him and Connie work together fine, it's just a flash, they've probably been irritating each other for a couple of days.'

'We couldn't afford to lose Connie.'

‘Connie ain’t going to leave, that’s just paranoia talking.’

‘I hope you’re right.’

‘Of course I’m right, there’s been rows like this before. Listen, somebody roll a joint, this is getting like a wake.’

Mac’s chick came down from the bedroom and made us all some coffee. We could hear the murmur of voices from the living room, but they weren’t sufficiently loud for us to make out what they were saying. It was a tense little scene as we drank our coffee and waited to see how the problem would resolve itself. A rift between Connie and Jerry was all we needed right then.

We sat there for about fifteen minutes, and then Connie and Jerry came out looking embarrassed and kind of sheepish. It didn’t seem right to ask them what had happened, and we all looked at them and waited. Connie grinned.

‘Gestalt therapy strikes again.’

‘You two kissed and made up, have you?’ Jerry laughed.

‘I wouldn’t kiss him, he’s far too ugly.’

There was a burst of relieved laughter, far in excess of what was merited by the ancient Oscar Wilde joke. When it had subsided, Steve up.

‘So what are we going to do?’

Jerry shrugged.

‘I guess we ought to get down to a bit of playing.’

Mac looked thoughtful.

‘We’ve got plenty of time down here. It seems a bit of a drag starting the first rehearsal by doing chores like tidying up the stage act.’

He was obviously trying to let us all down lightly, and it seemed a good idea to help him do it.

‘What do you suggest, man?’

‘Well, I’ve got some mescaline upstairs. I thought maybe if we dropped half a tab each and retired into the other room, we might find ourselves coming out with some interesting stuff.’

Connie laughed.

‘I’ll go along with that. Where’s the stuff?’

‘I’ll go and get it.’

The rest of the crew didn’t return until it was nearly dark, and we were all being slowly lowered back to our approximation of reality. We had been flying for most of the day, and had packed in playing about half past three, killed the last bottle of wine, dropped a Mandrax each, and moved into the living room, where we had quickly become very relaxed and giggly. Di had emerged from her bath while we were still playing and, instead of bothering to dress, she had just draped a rug around her shoulders. After we’d moved back into the living room, and begun to get more loaded, the rug had slipped until she was sitting at Jerry’s feet quire naked.

The return of the others was heralded by the flash of headlights in the lane. It was strange coping with this influx of energetic, talkative people carrying their bundles and packages, and rapping on about their adventures in the town.

Our stoned condition rather set us apart from the ones who had just come in, and we sat staring while they hustled about putting things away, opening bottles and making plans for dinner. It was quite a little while before I noticed that Sally seemed to be looking uptight and avoiding talking to me. I struggled out of my chair with some difficulty and blundered out into the kitchen, where she was stacking things away in the fridge.

‘What’s up with you?’

She looked at me coldly.

'Nothing, nothing at all.'

'Did something go wrong in town?'

'No. The trip into town was very pleasant.'

'So what's up then?'

'I told you, there's nothing the matter.'

'If there's nothing the matter, why are you walking around as though there was a bad smell in here?'

'I'm not, it's just…oh forget it.'

'Forget what?'

'It's nothing, really.'

'Forget what?'

'Oh… it's just that, you know, we were all packed off into town so the band could do some work, and we get back to find you all stoned out of your heads, and that little scrubber with Jerry parading around naked.'

'You mean Di. Di's okay, she just didn't bother to get dressed after her bath.'

'She bothered to put on her makeup and false eyelashes. And all that Indian jewellery that she wears.'

'So? We're having a holiday, anyone can do what they like. If you're jealous, you can take your clothes off. No one's going to mind.'

'I bet they won't.'

'Oh come on Sally, there's no harm been done.'

'Okay, okay, I said to forget it in the first place.'

I shrugged and gave up. The best thing seemed to be to go back to the safety of my chair in the living room. When I got there, however, I found that it had been taken over by Eddie.

Deprived of my refuge, I did the next best thing and squatted down cross-legged beside the roaring fire. In my stoned state it was really nice to bask in the heat, and I forgot completely about Sally.

In the shadows on the other side I saw Di, obviously luxuriating in the warmth. I grinned to myself when I noticed that, as Sally had said, she really was wearing jewellery and makeup. She was obviously well into satisfying Jerry's taste for the bizarre.

For a long time I watched fascinated as the flickering light of the fire reflected off her skin. Then, after a while, she caught my eye and giggled. I smiled back.

'You'll get awfully cold if you move away from the fire.'

She laughed. She was a good deal more stoned than the rest of us, and her voice was soft and slurred.

'I'm not going to move away from the fire. Not ever.' She giggled again, and Jerry looked down at her.

'You look a lot better without clothes.'

'I hate clothes. I'd never wear them if it wasn't for stupid people who get uptight at the truth.'

'You'd never wear clothes at all?'

'Not unless I was cold or something.'

'What would you do then?'

She paused to think for a theatrically long time. I think I d paint my body

'Yeah?'

Jerry looked interested.

'Why don't you do it now?'

'I don't know, it's too much hassle.'

'Supposing we did a paint job on you?'

‘A paint job.’

She rolled the words round her tongue, doing her best to make them come out sounding seductive.

‘Paint job, paint job, it sounds delicious.’

‘Do we have any paint?’

Connie looked round vaguely.

‘I don’t see any.’

Mac’s chick fumbled in her bag.

‘I’ve got some magic markers.’

She looked up slyly at Mac.

‘Can I have a paint job too?’

‘Sure, if you really want one.’

She nodded enthusiastically and passed the box of markers to Jerry.

‘Will they be okay?’

He tried one on the back of his hand.

‘Sure. Why don’t you and Di lie down in front of the fire? Incidentally, what’s your name?’

She paused in undoing her blouse.

‘It’s Amanda.’

‘Amanda. It’s always nice to know someone’s name before you start painting them. Do people call you Mandy?’

‘They do, but I don’t like it much.’

‘Then we’ll all call you Amanda. Okay?’

‘Fine.’

She wriggled out of her velvet trousers and was completely naked, apart from her rings and beads. She lay down beside Di.

‘I feel a bit like a human sacrifice, shall we hold hands?’

Di smiled, and took hold of Amanda’s hand.

‘Are we going to start then?’

Mac fumbled in his pocket.

‘Let’s have some more mescaline before we get into painting.’

‘Right on.’

He passed round the small polythene bag filled with pale blue capsules, and everybody took one. Chas, who was nearest the door, went out to distribute them among the people in the kitchen.

Jerry knelt dawn beside the two girls, and began drawing a rather crude stylized flower around Di’s left nipple. On the other side, Mac tried out some psychedelic squiggles on Amanda’s thigh. After covering about half her leg, he looked up at me.

‘Lou, you went to art school. Come here, and put your talents to work.’

I crouched beside Amanda, holding an orange marker and wondering what I ought to draw.

‘What would you like?’

‘Oh, anything, man. Whatever you think of.’

I leaned forward and began to trace the outline of a huge butterfly, right across her stomach. At first I thought I’d become a bit too ambitious, but then the mescaline started to come on, and, taking more colours out of the box, I started to get really involved in it.

When I’d finished, Di raised her head to look at the design on her companion’s stomach.

‘Oh, that’s beautiful. Will you do something for me? Please?’

I smiled, the whole room seemed to be filled with pleasant sexual vibes, and moved round so I was beside Di.

‘Roll over, and I’ll do something on your bottom.’

‘But I won’t be able to see it.’

‘Everyone else will’

‘But that’s not fair.’

‘You’ll be able to see it if you look ma mirror.’

‘That’s true.’

She turned over and lay on her stomach.

‘What are you going to do?’

‘Hang on, I’m just thinking about it.’

I took a yellow marker and began to rough out a pair of eyes, one on each buttock. Di turned her head to try and look.

‘What are you drawing?’

‘Eyes. Keep still or it’ll go wrong.’

Jerry laughed.

‘You’ll be able to see out of your arse.’

Di pouted.

‘Don’t be crude. This is a wonderful artistic experience. Isn’t it, Amanda?’

Amanda, who was sitting up admiring her stomach, nodded thoughtfully.

I was just putting the finishing touches to the eyes on Di’s rump when the door opened and Mike walked in.

‘Jesus, has the orgy begun already?’

Jerry grinned.

‘No man, it’s a wonderful artistic experience.’

‘Oh. Well, anyway, I just came in to tell you that there’s food ready in the kitchen for anyone who’s interested.’

‘Food? Far out.’

I finished the eyes and turned to look at him. Behind him in the doorway I saw Sally looking over his shoulder. Her face had tightened into a sour expression, and her hostile vibrations flashed across at me like a cold draught.

Relations with Sally went from bad to worse through the evening. Amanda and Di continued to walk around naked, resplendent in their body paint, and that in itself seemed to make Sally even more uptight.

The whole thing put quite a damper on my partying, particularly as she had dropped back into her old habit of pointedly refusing joints, which was a disappointment after the journey down when it had seemed that she was actually begin-fling to enjoy getting stoned. She made an even bigger deal of refusing when some kind of pills were passing round, and gradually she started single-handedly to make everyone feel really uncomfortable.

By ten-thirty we were all watching TV in silence, acutely aware of the bad feeling emanating from Sally’s side of the room. It was about then that Amanda made her try at hippie peacemaking.

‘Hey Sally, you don’t look too happy. Is there anything that you’d like?’

Sally shook her head coldly.

‘No thanks, I’m okay.’

‘You sure? You really don’t look as though you’re getting off.’

‘I’m quite all right.’

Sally’s attitude should have been enough to freeze anyone, but Amanda seemed determined to persevere.

‘Why don’t you take your clothes off and let Lou paint you? It’s really groovy not having to wear stuff, you’d really dig it.’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Aw come on, it’s great once you get into it.’

Sally looked at her as if she’d crawled out from under a stone.

‘Listen darling, the boys may be impressed by your hippie games but I’m not, so leave me alone. All right?’

Amanda backed away.

‘I was only trying to help.’

‘If you want to help, do the washing up or something.’

Sally stood up.

‘I’m going to make myself a cup of tea.’

She stalked out, and there was an awkward silence. Everything seemed to point to the fact that it was down to me to go out and talk to her. I left it to the last moment, and then tried to wander unobtrusively into the kitchen.

Sally was standing by the stove, resolutely watching the kettle boil. I walked across and stood beside her.

‘Sal. Amanda didn’t mean any harm. She was only trying to bring you into things.’

‘I don’t need to get into things like running round daubed with magic marker.’

‘Nobody’s forcing you to. She was just trying to be friendly.’

‘She’d be friendly to anyone.’

‘I never thought you were a fucking prude.’

‘I’m not a prude, I just don’t try to rub everyone’s nose in it.’

‘Okay, so Di and Amanda want to show off. You ought to ignore them, there’s no need to let it hang you up.’

‘It doesn’t hang me up, I just don’t want to get involved in their games.’

‘Listen, take it easy, they’re only stoned. I thought you were looking forward to coming down here.’

‘I was, but I’m rapidly beginning to regret it.’

‘You’re blowing this whole thing out of proportion.’

‘Don’t talk to me about proportion. It’s you lot who need a sense of proportion. I came down here with the intention of sleeping with you, sure, but I’m not prepared to get involved in an orgy.’

‘What orgy?’

‘Okay, maybe that’s the wrong word, but I like my sex in private.’

‘That’s your privilege. Nobody’s going to force you into anything you don’t want to do.’

She looked as though she was about to relent, and I put a hand on her shoulder.

‘Don’t get hung up, let’s try and enjoy ourselves. Please.’

She half smiled.

‘I’m sorry Lou, I’ve been behaving badly.’

‘Forget it. Let’s have something to eat and try to ignore all these freaks.’

Over the next few days Sally was less of a problem. Christmas Day was a great help, where the exchange of presents and the general eating and drinking seemed to put us all on a level. Apart from Christmas, I also made an effort to spend a good deal of time with Sally, and as a result of this, the two of us seemed to be set apart from the others, except when I was actually playing with the band.

There was a certain amount of strain involved in keeping Sally happy. When things started to get a bit wild, I found that rather than go along with it, I was tending to withdraw and act as a damper on the rest of the party. Now and then I caught myself wondering if screwing Sally was really worth all the trouble, and speculating on what either Di or Amanda would be like in bed.

Despite the effect of being somewhat cut off from the others, it still seemed that the holiday with Sally was proving fairly enjoyable in a low key sort of way, and under the conditions of

compromise she even began to behave quite pleasantly towards Jerry.

I think it was Sally's new be-nice-to-Jerry policy that got us involved in Jerry's scheme for us all to go for a country ramble together.

It was a couple of days after Boxing Day, and for some reason we'd all got up fairly early. Over a haphazard breakfast there was talk of us rehearsing, but nobody seemed terribly enthusiastic.

Jerry summed it up.

'We're getting stale.'

'Maybe we should leave it out for today, and see if it happens for us tomorrow.'

Jerry nodded.

'Yeah, that's the best idea.'

He sipped his coffee, and then abruptly put his cup down.

'I know what the trouble with us is.'

'Yeah? What?'

'We're not getting enough exercise.'

'Exercise? What do we want with exercise?'

'We've been lying round here for days, just eating, drinking and taking drugs. No wonder we're getting stale.'

Di giggled.

'Doesn't screwing count as exercise?'

Jerry ignored her.

'I think it'd be a great idea if we walked down to the beach and spent the afternoon tripping about. It's a nice day.'

'It's fucking freezing.'

'And it's about half an hour to the beach.'

Jerry spread his hands.

'It's a wonderful day. The sun's shining. It's the best day since we've been down here. It's fucking absurd coming all the way down to Cornwall without going outside except to get in and out of the car.'

Jerry was right in that the weather was really beautiful outside. It was one of those bright winter jays when, if you find a sheltered spot out of the wind, you can almost imagine that it is warm. I think the sunlight streaming through the window helped Jerry convince the rest of us to go along with his plan. At the end of ten minutes' persuasion, only Di was unwilling to join the trek to the beach.

'I don't see the point of marching miles across the countryside, and anyway, I don't have the boots for it.'

She held up a boot with a three-inch heel.

'I can't go scrambling over rocks in these.'

'So you'd rather rot indoors.'

'I would really.'

'Suit yourself.'

We slowly began to swathe ourselves in scarves and overcoats. I struggled into my trusty leather jacket, and pulled on my cowboy boots. While everyone milled about getting dressed, I saw Di sitting at a table all on her own, rolling herself a joint.

'Are you sure you don't want to come with us?'

'No really, I'd rather stay here. I'll keep the fire going.'

'Okay, if you're sure about it.'

We set off across the hillside, but after fifteen minutes we were panting and coughing, and we were forced to stop and rest. Shane tried to roll a joint on the top of a rock, but the wind carried away both the tobacco and the dope, and he gave up the attempt.

It took us the best part of an hour to get to the beach, and we immediately flopped down on some rocks and stared at the sea while we got our breath back.

'Is this what we came all this way to look at?'

'Aw come on, it's really nice.'

'Yeah? We got to walk all the way back again. I do wonder whether it was all worth it.'

Sally, who seemed to be about the fittest of the whole party, got up while the rest of us were still sitting, learning to breathe again and complaining, and walked along the beach to explore the rocks at the far end. When she was little more than a speck at the far end of the beach, Jerry turned to me and grinned.

'Now that bird's left you alone for a couple of minutes, how about dropping a spot of acid?'

I hesitated.

'I don't think so, it's all a bit too tense at the moment.'

'Oh come on Lou, what's happening to you? I've never seen you turn down a chance to get stoned.'

The feeling came back that I was slipping away from the rest of the band. The idea of getting stoned with the lads was very attractive, but then again, getting out of my mind would probably cause aggravation with Sally. Then I just thought, fuck it, why should I let some chick stop me getting stoned?

'Okay, you convinced me.'

Jerry handed me a tiny pink tab and I swallowed it. We stayed sitting on the rock for a while, and gradually I started to go up and felt the signs, the slight tightening of my skin, and what I can only call a consciousness of my teeth, that the acid was working. The sea looked immense, and I stared at it fascinated, thinking how it went on and on.

I saw Sally coming back down the beach towards me. The rest of the lads had wandered off a little way, and were poking about in the sand. They looked a bit too much like the end of *La Dolce Vita* for me to join them, but, at the same time, I wasn't too keen on going off with Sally. I was struck with an overpowering urge to take off in the opposite direction.

Ahead of me, about a hundred and fifty yards away, the beach ended in a point of high cliffs that jutted out into the sea. With the hallucinations starting to come on, I stumbled towards them. I heard a voice calling behind me, but I didn't look back, I knew if I got caught up with other people I was lost. It seemed vitally important that I should reach the cliffs.

I got to the foot of them, and stared up for a long while in awe at the towering wall of rock. I began to scramble up the huge boulders that littered the final strip of beach.

Gradually I worked my way along the bottom rock, marvelling at how the sea had gouged deep channels and huge caverns out of the granite. I felt terribly vulnerable, like a fragile sandwich between the power of the rocks and the sea.

I crawled into one of the caves. Its walls were wet and slimy, like it had just been vacated by some huge immortal sea beast. I crouched in the cave for a while, feeling like a cheeky interloper in the den of the monster. I examined the texture of the wall, and pressed my hands against its cold, wet surface.

The whole cave was very cold, it seemed as though the entire planet was sucking the heat out of me. Then I looked up. Looking up in the cave was similar to looking down from a great height. The idea of the tons and tons of granite poised above my head became very frightening, and, although I told myself there was no logical reason why a cliff that had stood for millions of years should suddenly fall down, I simply had to get out.

I scrambled out into the sunlight, and things changed completely. Back in the sun, I was transformed into a hero figure, a Beowulf or a Conan, who had outwitted the beast and ascended from the underworld, back into the light of day.

Full of acid energy, I started to climb. It was lucky that the cliff was broken and easy to

climb. If it had been sheer, I would probably have broken my neck. As it was, I got about halfway up and ran out of breath. The Conan fantasy faded and I found myself clinging to a very inadequate ledge, high above the sea.

I resisted the compulsion to look down, and wondered if 1 ought to go up or back. The expanse of rock between me and the top didn't look too hard to climb, even for an out of condition hippie in high-heeled boots. The thought of having to deal with coast guards and air-sea rescue people while I was high on acid spurred me on. I began to climb, this time with grim, stiff-upper-lip determination, and eventually, after much puffing, blowing and stomach wrenching slips, I came within a couple of feet of the top.

A surprise was waiting for me as I hauled myself over the edge of the cliff. All the way up, I had imagined the top to be a soft grassy field, but as I scrambled up, I found to my horror that a thick hedge of brambles ran along it. This was the worst part of all. There was no question of turning back, and I was forced to claw my way inch by inch through the tangle of nature's own barbed wire. I finally emerged with a rip in my shirt, and bleeding from a number of cuts and scratches. I flopped on the grass, and watched the sky revolve for a while.

It was surely the most energetic acid trip I had ever taken. Five minutes of lying on the grass convinced me that I was getting cold, and the roaring fire back at the cottage became very attractive. One consolation of my assault on the cliff was that I seemed to have come out maybe a quarter of a mile up the track between St Rube and the sea.

I set off along the track and within twenty minutes I was in sight of home. The cottage, with all the cars parked outside it, still had its *True Detective* sinister look, but if anything it lent a touch of urban homeliness to the rural wilds.

I was the first one back and found Di sitting by the fire with Hendrix pumping out of the stereo. She looked up as I walked in. I suppose I must have looked pretty weird, wild acid-eyes and all the cuts and scratches.

'What happened to you? You look like you been in a fight.'

I lit a cigarette and tried to get myself together.

'I climbed up a cliff and through a sodding great thorn hedge.'

'What on earth for?'

I grinned.

'Dunno. I was under the impression I was some kind of superhero.'

She laughed.

'You half look a mess. Are you stoned?'

'Out of my mind. Jerry gave me some acid.'

Di looked at me slyly.

'I thought that chick of yours was keeping you away from drugs?'

'Fuck that shit. I turned the whole fucking band on to acid.'

'Okay, okay. Don't get hung up about it. Is there anything that you want?'

I thought about it.

'A cup of coffee wouldn't go amiss.'

She stood up.

'I'll go make some. Want a joint?'

'Sure.'

I followed her into the kitchen, and watched as she put the kettle on. As it boiled, she sat down at the table and began to roll a joint.

'What happened to the others?'

'I don't know, what with my cliff climbing exploits, I rather lost track of them. I expect they'll be back soon, though. It's starting to get cold.'

'That's a pity.'

The invitation was so broad that even in my addled state I couldn't miss it. I looked up and

down her body and agreed with her.

She poured the coffee, we carried it and the joint back into the living room, and settled ourselves by the fire.

'I don't know much about you.'

She smiled.

'There's not much to know, really. I met Jerry at Shane's pad a couple of weeks ago, and he invited me down here.'

'So what do you do the rest of the time?'

She shook her head.

'Nothing much, hang out, try and enjoy myself.'

'A groupie?'

'I don't know. I know a lot of musicians, but I don't feel like a groupie.'

'Do you ever think about getting something together of your own?'

She shrugged.

'I think about it, but I can't seem to find anything that I can really get into. That's why I like musicians, they're doing their own thing. It's good to be with people who are really into something.'

We seemed to run out of conversation, and there was a long pause while I looked deep into the fire, temporarily fascinated by the shapes of the flames. Di finally jerked me back to reality.

'Do you mind if I ask you something?'

'No, I don't think so. What?'

'Why did you bring that chick down here? She hardly seems to fit in at all. She really cramps everything.'

'Is it that bad?'

'Jerry seems to think so. He keeps wanting to get outrageous, have orgies and things, but he thinks you'll get uptight.'

'Yeah? How do you feel about an orgy?'

She laughed.

'Love it.'

'I doubt if Sally would.'

'That's the whole trouble. Don't be upset, I mean, if you dig her or something, but she really comes on like a pain in the arse.'

I nodded and thought about it. Sally did seem to be driving a wedge between me and the, others.

'I used to know her years ago, and suddenly met her again. It seemed like a good idea to bring her along.'

'Things like that never seem to work out.'

'I guess you're right.'

I looked at her.

'How old are you?'

'Eighteen.'

'Looks like you're a good deal smarter than I am.'

I took her hand, and we sat in silence for a while. Then suddenly I was startled by a voice from the doorway.

'This is all very cosy.'

Sally had come in without our noticing. She stood by the door looking cold and furious.

'Hello Sal, come and sit by the fire.'

'No thank you!'

She stalked across the room and stamped up the stairs. I glanced at Di.

‘Better go cool it out.’

‘You ought to just leave her alone.’

‘I feel kind of responsible.’

She shrugged.

‘It’s your problem.’

Upstairs in the bedroom, Sally was busily packing her things. and it took me half an hour of soft-voiced acid logic before she finally relented. I took her in my arms and within another ten minutes we were naked and in bed.

It was surprisingly good, despite all the emotional hangups, but, from my point of view, with the acid starting to tail off it would have probably been good with almost anyone, and I kept having flashes of what it would be like doing it with Di.

Everything was going fine when I felt Sally stiffen. There was a noise behind me and she began to struggle, and push me away, shrieking.

‘You’re all fucking perverts, I should never have let you talk me into staying.’

‘Whatthefuck...?’

I rolled over and blinked at two figures in the doorway. Jerry was grinning and pulling the plate out of a Polaroid camera. Behind him, Di leaned against the doorway looking amused. Sally struggled into her clothes.

‘You bastards just aren’t normal. I know you all think that you’re big and smart, but you’re not. You’re just little boys playing dirty games with sex and drugs. The whole thing’s disgusting.’

I swung my legs over the side of the bed.

‘Listen Sally, I...’

‘Oh for God’s sake shut up Lou, you’ve talked me out of leaving too many times already. I thought maybe you were worth something, but you’re just as sick as the rest of them.’

‘Sick?’

Jerry’s face twisted into a sneer.

‘You calling us sick, lady? What gives you the right to call us sick?’

He held up the Polaroid snap.

‘See that? That’s you babe, humping for all you’re worth and really digging it. What makes the way you fuck so much more elegant than the way we fuck? Take a look at yourself, babe. You see anything that elevates you enough to put down Di or me or any of us? Oh sure, we’re sick, sure we’re sick, but it’s people like you who make the situation. We don’t have your fucking morality, we don’t even want it. It’s people like you who have all this morality. You’re the ones who flaunt your fucking morals, and then you go out and bend them, cheat a bit, break a few rules. I don’t break no rules, because I don’t make any. I don’t have any rules that I know I’m going to break.’

He paused for breath. Sally was rigid in the corner. She opened her mouth to speak, but Jerry went straight on.

‘We may be sick, but we keep it to ourselves. Look at you, you call us sick, but you’re fascinated, you couldn’t leave us alone, could you, you hustled your way down here, you wanted to see it all go on, you didn’t want to take part, but you wanted to see it, you wanted to sit in judgment. We’re here, and we’re the way we are, and that’s it. We make our rules and our own morals, and we follow them. We don’t squirm around trying to get the best of both worlds. We don’t try and fuck people up because of some petty jealousy.’

Sally looked like she was about to explode.

‘You don’t fuck people up?’

She pointed at Di.

‘What do you think happens to kids like her? Don’t you think they get messed up by your perverted games?’

Di stepped in front Of Jerry. She looked as furious as Sally. 'Girls who hang round with rock groups are looking for adventure. They know what can happen, it's their decision. The only people who get messed up are stupid bitches like you who want the best of both worlds.'

Sally took a step towards Di, and looked as though she was about to hit her.

'Don't you talk to me like that, you little whore. You can't disguise what you are with a whole lot of philosophical rubbish.'

It seemed as though it was about time to put a stop to this scene. I was beginning to feel ridiculous, sitting on the bed stark naked while everyone yelled at each other.

'Shut the fuck up. Just shut up for a minute, will you.'

I turned to Sally.

'You're forgetting one thing, babe, this is our house, and you're our guest, not some sort of moral counsellor. I've gone out of my way to compromise while you've been down here, but you just don't want to know. We're a rock and roll band, a big time rock and roll band, and we have to put up with a lot of people on our backs all the time. We spent a whole lot of bread putting together a trip like this so we can relax and party. You didn't seem to want to get into a lot of dope, or mass screwing, and I've respected that. That's your right, it's the only right you've got. You don't have no right to start driving a wedge between me and the band...'

Sally began to puff up with indignation.

'Just because you make a couple of records doesn't give you the right...'

'Just shut up, I don't want to hear it. We've got every right, darling. Nobody's interfered with you, and you don't have any reason to call Di names because she likes to get stoned and take her clothes off. No reason except your prejudice and bad manners. Got it?'

She was bright pink by the end of my speech and she jerked her finger towards Jerry's camera.

'I don't call taking obscene pictures of us "not interfering".'

Jerry laughed.

'You think you're obscene?'

She swung to hit him, but I grabbed her arm.

'It's your own fault, you just pushed everyone too far. They decided to play a prank on you. Nothing's been hurt except your precious dignity. There's nothing to get violent about. If you can't hack it, you'd better leave, because you're getting between me and the band.'

'I'm leaving all right.'

'Okay.'

I picked up my jeans and fumbled in the pocket. I found two flyers, and handed them to her.

'Here's the train fare, Eddie'll run you to the station.'

She looked at the money.

'The train fare's only about a flyer.'

I shrugged as I pulled my jeans on.

'Go first class.'

Sally didn't say a word as she came downstairs with her suitcase in her hand, and followed Eddie out to the car. As soon as I heard it pull away I flopped back in my seat.

'Gimme a drink, I need one.'

Di laughed and went to get me a glass. It was like coming back to my family. I looked at Jerry.

'Got any speed, it's about time we got this party going?'

Jerry grinned.

'Lou has come back to us.'

'Welcome back, Lou.'

Connie passed me a joint.

‘That broad was fucking weird.’

I shook my head.

‘She wasn’t weird, she was just an average straight chick.’

Jerry fumbled in the pocket of his Levi jacket and tossed the picture of Sally and me screwing on to the table.

‘Here’s a souvenir for you, kid. Let it be a reminder not to luck around with straights.’

Di handed me a drink as everyone broke up laughing.

The last two days in Cornwall were the freakout that everyone had been looking for when they went down there. We all began dropping a lethal combination of speed, mescaline and the odd Mandrax, which, coupled with the staples of booze and dope, sucked us into a swirling dance of knife-edge sensuality that had both aspects of Eden and flashes of a Fellini nightmare.

I was out of my mind most of the time, so that the real sequence of events tends to merge with the fantasy, and I think that if the Polaroid camera hadn’t been a constant toy during the whole episode it would have been hard to believe a lot of what happened without the pile of snapshots.

I can remember very vividly sitting on the floor cross-legged in someone’s dressing gown, with Di beside me, again naked except for her jewellery and makeup, sorting through a whole pile of the small square cardboard prints. The size of the pile indicated that it was pretty far on in the party, but beyond that, I found it hard to place it in any kind of logical time sequence. I was staring fascinated at one of Jerry, done up in full makeup and somebody’s dress, posing with a bottle in one hand and his arm around a naked Amanda.

‘Jerry makes a very passable chick, you know.’

Di slowly turned her head, she seemed to have started to move in slow motion. A smile spread across her face a fraction of an inch at a time.

‘He does quite well as a man, also.’

The word ‘also’ came out like a slow sigh. I had a vivid memory of having balled Di, her face dissolving into points of colour, in the recent past.

‘Better than me?’

It was a sharp-edged question that Di immediately recognized.

‘That’s paranoia.’

It came out like a Disney goldfish blowing bubbles.

‘Paranoia, Lou. It’s different, don’t make value judgments, it’s just different.’

At that instant I was intent on not letting go of the subject.

‘Put it this way, if you were presented with me and Jerry, which one would you fuck?’

She pawed abstractedly through the photos.

‘In a word, both of you.’

She seized a picture.

‘Look, I did.’

In the jumble of flesh, Di’s, Jerry’s and my face were clearly distinguishable. I stared at it and sank into a wordless revelation, of the spuriousness of comparisons. Both was such an obvious answer. The feeling of being a Zen master slowly faded, and I was left feeling uncomplicatedly horny. I put an arm round Di.

‘Do you feel like fucking again?’

She shook her head.

‘Not yet, I want to look at the pictures.’

I laughed.

‘Now you’re the Zen master.’

She looked puzzled, but leaned over and kissed me.

‘Nobody ever said that to me before.’

I went on looking at the picture of the three of us rolling on the bed, then Di nudged me.

‘Who’s this?’

It was another tangle of arms and legs, but apparently only two this time.

‘One of them’s Connie, but I don’t know who the other is.’

‘I thought it was Connie, but who’s the other one, it looks like another guy?’

I looked closely at the photo.

‘Those limbs look very male, and they can’t all be Connie’s.’

Di nodded solemnly.

‘Very male.’

‘So our Connie’s become a faggot, oh the shame of it.’

‘The shame of what?’

At that moment, as though by magic the door to the outside opened, and Connie walked in, followed by Ruth. They were both wrapped up against the cold.

‘The shame of what?’

‘What?’

‘I heard you mention my name, and then say “the shame of it”. I wondered what the shame was of.’

I had trouble dealing with the two figures standing in the middle of the room, towering over us, radiating outside cold. I peered up at Connie.

‘You’re paranoid.’

He didn’t seem to care.

‘Have you been lurking outside listening to what we’ve been saying?’

‘You’re paranoid too.’

‘Well, have you?’

‘No, we’ve been trying to raise King Arthur.’

‘Did you?’

‘No, but we nearly fell down a mine shaft. The fucking countryside’s riddled with them. Anyway, what were you talking about?’

‘Have a look at this picture.’

I handed him the photo.

‘Oh yes, that.’

‘Is that all you can say?’

‘What should I say?’

‘I hand you a photo of yourself in a lewd embrace with a person of the same sex, and all you can say is “oh yes, that”.

Who’s the other guy?’

‘My lips are sealed.’

‘Ah Connie, who is it?’

‘Like I said, my lips are sealed.’

‘The person who took the photo must know.’

Ruth exploded in a deep throaty chuckle. Connie flashed a grin at her.

‘Her lips are sealed too.’

They both burst out laughing. It was too much for my damaged brains, and I looked round helplessly.

‘What did I say?’

Di suddenly had a flash of comprehension and fell over on her side and lay giggling.

‘Somebody put me out of my misery.’

Connie knelt down beside me and put an arm round my shoulder.

‘Lou.’

‘Yes.’

‘Listen carefully.’

He began to laugh and I had to wait patiently until he’d finished.

‘Suppose I was to put forward the proposition that the other figure in the photograph was you?’

‘I’d deny it.’

‘It’s not you?’

‘No.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘I think so. It’s not me, is it?’

I could remember a lot of mass romping, but I couldn’t re-call any exclusive scene with Connie. As far as I could recall all of my contacts had been at least marginally heterosexual. Connie straightened up, shaking his head.

‘The poor dear boy must have deep-seated fears about his masculinity.’

Ruth nodded, a sad-wise Doctor Kildare parody.

‘He blots out everything he’s not prepared to accept.’

‘It’s a terrible shame.’

I looked up at them.

‘Are you trying to tell me I’ve balled a drummer?’

‘There he goes, trying to pretend he doesn’t remember. It’s so sad.’

They walked off tutting theatrically, leaving Di and me sitting with the pile of Polaroid snaps.

‘Did I really screw Connie?’

She laughed.

‘I don’t know, I wasn’t there.’

‘You joined in the fun just now.’

‘Sure, it was really funny. Either they were putting you on, or you did have a scene with Connie, or else the photo isn’t actually what it appears to be. Either way it’s funny.’

I digested her piece of logic. It was weird I couldn’t dredge up any kind of memory of the event. It looked as though my only two alternatives were to get hung up or mentally to shrug it off and see what happened. I mentally shrugged it off. If I was a latent poof it would come to the fore in the end. As long as I got off it was okay.

Back in London, the talk began to turn towards America. Our first album had been released over there, and was doing quite well. The obvious next stage was to go there ourselves and get the record moving. The first step on the road to the USA was a visit to Jimmy and the white room.

One of the privileges of becoming successful was that Jimmy now served us Jack Daniels instead of beer, and our business meetings usually consisted of Jimmy telling the band what was happening, while we got drunk and made smart remarks. We tried to keep the meeting about America fairly together, but even that was constantly being injected with touches of the absurd.

‘So when are we leaving?

Jimmy spread his hands in a conciliatory Al Capone gesture. It was only February, but he was wearing a white suit and coming on very Italian.

‘It’s not as easy as all that.’

‘We’ve got to go, haven’t we? So let’s go. I’m pissed off with England. We’ve been round the country three times in the last year.’

‘There’s a lot to be done before you ship out to the new world.’

‘What?’

‘I’d like to see a little more action out of Carousel.’

Carousel was our US label.

‘But I didn’t think they’d do much until we were out there.’

‘They need goosing up to do a lot more advance work, and then, of course, we actually have to find enough suitable dates for you.’

‘Will that be hard?’

‘You’d probably have to go second on the bill first time round, but if Carousel are behind it, it shouldn’t be too hard.’

‘When can I have a car?’

It was one of Jerry’s random side tracks, he was by then clutching his fourth bourbon.

‘You’ve got a car, a fucking great Zephyr.’

‘I don’t mean for the band, I mean for me.’

Jimmy stared at him.

‘For you?’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you don’t have enough money, that’s why not.’

Jerry began to exhibit the telltale signs that he was about to become awkward.

‘I saw a second-hand Mustang for fifteen hundred quid.’

‘You don’t have fifteen hundred quid.’

‘Why?’

‘Why.’

Jimmy became very patient, as though he was talking to a retarded child. Jimmy rarely lost his temper. The patient act was about the nearest he usually came.

‘I’ll tell you why. For a start...’

He leaned closer to Jerry. His other trick was the proximity game, a bending of the instinctive territory laws that govern how near you get to people in any given situation.

‘…If I gave you fifteen hundred, I’d have to give everyone else fifteen hundred.’

He looked around at the rest of us.

‘Right?’

We all nodded.

‘Right.’

‘So that’s seven and a half grand, which we don’t have.’

Jerry’s face was set in a stubborn scowl.

‘Why not?’

‘Because...’

Jimmy’s patience became even more emphasized.

‘You don’t make that much of a profit.’

‘We’ve had three singles and two albums in the charts. How the fuck don’t we make a profit?’

‘You do make a profit, it’s just that you don’t have a lot of it at the moment. The majority of your record royalties don’t come in for nearly a year. The same applies to the song publishing. That just leaves the tours, and, let’s face it, the tours don’t make money after we’ve paid all the bills you run up, the damage, the booze, the drugs. You always want the best, and it mounts up.’

Jerry’s stubbornness became tinged with suspicion. ‘How much do we have, at the moment?’

‘There’s about seven grand in the current account.’

‘So why can’t we have some of it?’

‘Because if you want to go to America, we’ll need most of that to float the deal.’

‘How come we have to pay for our own tour? Why can’t Carousel pay for the tour?’

Jimmy did his handspreading gesture once again.

‘I’m trying to get them to underwrite part of it, but we’ll still have to pay a lot of our own expenses.’

Connie frowned.

‘We’ll get most of it back from doing the gigs though, won’t we?’

‘We should do, barring disaster, but it’ll be necessary to put out a lot of front money.’

‘And that’ll be ours?’

‘Most of it.’

‘And so we don’t really have any bread we can spend?’

‘Not really.’

‘Great, isn’t it?’

Jerry reached for the bottle of Jack Daniels.

‘Can’t we even get a bit more bread each week?’

‘You’re getting fifty already.’

‘Yeah, but it just seems to go.’

We all nodded.

‘It’s true, Jimmy, fifty quid a week don’t seem to get us anywhere.’

Mac took up the argument.

‘I mean, there’re geezers working on the line in Ford’s making more bread than we do, and we’re supposed to be the biggest thing to hit Britain since the Stones. What happened to the days when rock and roll stars bought their mother a house?’

Jimmy stuck his face very close to Mac’s.

‘You want to buy your mother a house?’

‘No but...’

‘Okay then.’

‘But listen...’

‘But nothing. It’s about time you boys got some kind of grasp of reality.’

Jerry swayed to his feet.

‘Eh Vito, you gotta have-a some kinda respecta.’

At the Mafia parody, Jimmy’s face darkened.

‘You might not believe it, but you can still get into trouble making jokes like that.’

Jerry fell back into his chair.

‘Okay, okay. Don’t get uptight.’

Connie tried to restore some kind of order to the meeting.

‘So how soon do we go to the States, and what happens in the meantime?’

Jimmy seemed to have cooled down, and he went through the plans very carefully.

‘I imagine we could go in about twelve weeks. We ought to stay for about a month. We ought to do a couple of concerts here before we go.’

‘Where?’

‘I think we should try for the Festival Hall, and maybe the Free Trade Hall, Manchester.’

‘Do you think we can fill them on our own?’

‘With a good support group it should be easy. It’ll put a lot of money in the tank.’

It looked as though there was nothing left to talk about, and I thought we should split before Jerry started on Jimmy again. I stood up.

‘Is there anything else?’

Jimmy looked up.

‘Oh yeah, I’ve been on to Terry Venables, you know, the guy from Woodfield who puts

together the free concerts in Hyde Park. I'm fixing it with him so we can do one when we come back.'

'Fucking great!'

Even Jerry looked pleased.

'I could get behind that. I could really get off behind a free concert.'

We all stood up, and Connie and I worked as sheepdogs for the now almost drunk band.

The twelve weeks before we went to the States went very quickly. We rehearsed hard, first for the Festival Hall, and then for the American tour. The Festival Hall show was a sellout, but, although the audience loved it, to us it was a very ordinary show. I suppose it was part of the buildup to the US trip, and in a way, we rather went through it without being aware of how important it was to our situation in England. To us, the event of Jerry having his ear pierced seemed just as important. Particularly when it swelled up and he bitched about it for days.

One other thing happened during the preparations for the trip to the States that shook us up for a while, and seemed in a weird way to be a kind of omen, but of what we weren't exactly sure.

Ever since the first single had made the charts, we had received a few letters, the usual kind of fan mail that went on about how groovy we were, or gave phone numbers and invited us to call them any time we were in Middlesbrough or Accrington.

It came as something of a shock when, about three weeks before we were due to leave, we got the first flutter letter. It was Connie who picked up the mail that particular morning, and none of us took much notice while he was opening the four or five letters that had been lying on the mat.

'Jesus Christ! Have a look at this.'

I looked up from the *Playboy* I'd been flicking through. Connie was holding a single sheet of paper and looking as though it had just bitten him.

'What is it? A bill?'

'Here, have a look.'

I took the letter from him. It was a single sheet of cheap lined notepaper, written on in crude capitals.

TO THE POP GROUP CALLED WILLY'S RATS
I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU SCUM CAME FROM. I EXPECT IT WAS A SEWER. YOU ARE POISONING THE MINDS OF THE YOUTH OF OUR GREAT NATION WITH THE FILTH YOU DARE TO CALL SONGS. SOMEBODY WILL SOON PUT YOU WHERE YOU BELONG AND NOT BEFORE TIME.

A CONCERNED FATHER

I read it twice, and then took it through into Jerry's room and showed it to him.

'What do you think of that then?'

'Heavy.'

'You can say that again.'

Jerry shrugged.

'I guess it's inevitable, in a way, the more successful you get, the more you're liable to attract head cases. It's probably some old geezer who subconsciously wants to screw his daughter, and uses letters to people like us, the sort of people she finds attractive, to vent his frustrations. I wouldn't worry about it though.'

‘I’m not worried, but it makes you think. You only have to get a bit ahead of the rest of the crowd and wham, all the weirdos come creeping out of the woodwork.’

Jerry sat up in bed and struggled into his shirt.

‘So?’

‘Well, I may be paranoid, but I can’t help thinking. If there are people who need to work out their frustrations by writing letters, you might come across one one day who needs to work them out with a gun. You know what I mean?’

Jerry pulled on his trousers and zipped them up.

‘I know what you mean, but there’s never been a rock star assassinated yet.’

I shrugged.

I guess you’re right, but it doesn’t make me too comfortable. I mean, look at Kennedy, look at Malcolm X. I’m surprised nobody ever took a shot at Dylan or Jagger, particularly Dylan.’

Jerry scratched his armpit.

‘Come on man. You’re being fucking paranoid. Nobody’s about to start shooting at us.’

I nodded.

‘Sure, I know you’re right.’

I went back to into the living room. I knew Jerry was right in telling me that it was all my own paranoia, but somehow I just couldn’t shake the uncomfortable feeling that the letter had given me.

The day finally arrived, and we were leaving. It was like moving the Eighth Army. Ruth and Di were being left in the pad to take care of it, and all our favourite little thingies had been removed from shelves and locked in drawers. There seemed to be suitcases stacked all over the floor.

There had been a kind of low key party the night before, but despite that we were all up by nine-thirty, milling about and losing things. At half past ten Mac and Steve turned up, and about fifteen minutes later Chas, Eddie, Mike and Derek wandered in. For the next two hours there was total panic as we tried to find everything we needed. Passports were lost and found. Suitcases were closed, only to be reopened. Connie lost a ring and was struck by a superstitious panic that to fly without it was courting disaster. It then took a straight fifteen minutes to convince Jerry that American batteries would work in his fuzz box.

Miraculously, around one o’clock, we found that everything was actually together, and that we had an hour to get stoned before we had to leave for the airport.

There were eight of us going, the band plus Chas, Eddie and Jimmy, who would meet us at Heathrow. Mike and Derek would come to the airport with us to bring back the car and the truck.

It was a really magnificent spring day, and the drive out of London, stoned behind the joints we’d had, gave the whole journey an air of optimism. Jerry began singing *Pastures of Plenty* and *Blowin’ Down That Old Dusty Road.*

Jimmy was waiting for us in the terminal building, and everyone was in such a high good humour that Jerry and Jimmy even refrained from baiting each other. We made our last farewells with Mike, Derek and the girls and then swaggered into the departure lounge, camping up the international rock star act as hard as we could, to swill duty-free booze until our plane was called.

Airports and planes try very hard to be the ultimate symbol of twentieth-century living, and we did our best to live up to it. We made our way out to the plane, all trying to pull the studied cool that, oh yeah, we did it every week. We managed to keep it up until we finally had taken off, and then it cracked under the weight of schoolboy fascination for what was

going on.

'Shit man, look at those houses down there.'

We all peered out of the windows at the miniature cityscape below. Then it dropped away under the cloud layer, and we fell to investigating the what-to-do-in-a-crash booklet, the sick bag, the free post-cards and the brochure all about the DC9.

When the possibilities of the seat pocket were exhausted, the stewardess came round with copies of *Time, Life* and *Newsweek,* and these kept us amused until dinner was served. The rest of the lads hitched and made remarks about plastic food, but I'd always had a fascination for the TV-dinner arrangements of airline food, with each portion of the meal in its separate compartment, and was quite happy.

Once the meal was over, the stewardess began serving drinks, and the band fell to getting lushed. The flight had been marked in the original booklet as being a champagne flight, which meant that we were served with one free miniature plastic shatterproof bottle with gold foil round the neck, which held about enough liquid to fill the plastic shatterproof glass. It was rather like the legendary dope pusher, the first one came free, and after that we had to break into our collection of brand new dollars.

It wasn't long before our folding tables were full of little green plastic bottles, and our champagne high spirits were beginning to annoy the other passengers. Fortunately we seemed to amuse the stewardess and she kept on serving us booze. The only drawback to the whole thing was the idea of a five hour flight with no dope. I complained about it to Jerry, but he just winked, and pulled out a cigarette case. I didn't catch on straight away.

'What the luck are you doing with a cigarette case?'

He flipped it open, and there were five or six single skin grass joints.

'You're not going to try to take them through customs. You gotta be crazy.'

'No, of course not. These are for the plane.'

I glanced around.

'We can't start smoking dope here. We'll be sussed straight away.'

'I know we can't turn on sitting here, but I reckon we can take some trips back to the john. Everyone knows that rock musicians have weak bladders.'

Jerry swayed down the aisle to the toilet, and as soon as he had come back I took his place, blew the little joint, and watched smoke disappearing into the air conditioning. When I got back to my seat Jerry had moved over and was rapping to Chas. Connie flopped into the seat next to me.

'I've just been talking to the redhaired hostess.'

'Yeah, how did you make out?'

He grinned.

'She's all right, she's carrying a couple of weights into New York.'

'You're kidding.'

'That's what she said, apparently hash fetches a thousand dollars a weight in America.'

'Jesus, we should have brought some with us.'

'We're rock musicians, not dope smugglers. After all the hassle with getting work permits after our dope bust, they'll probably take us apart at Kennedy airport. We've got enough to do to get rid of the dope we've got with us.'

'That'll be a struggle.'

'We'll have to persevere.'

I slid past Connie, collected another joint off Jerry and made it back to the john.

For the rest of the flight, we tried *our* best to dispose of the last of the dope, and arrived at Kennedy clean, but hardly able to deal with customs and immigration without breaking down in fits of laughing.

At the end of *Let Me Take You Down,* Mac holds on to a wail of feedback. Above it I yell at the crowd. It's the start of the build-up to the end, the last, straight through all the way until, if it all comes together, we push them right over the top. It's this last push in which we either make the show or lose it. All fears of stampeding audiences and crazy snipers are swamped by the overriding desire to get these people going. It's a battle of wills: can we grab hold of all these people and drag them to a place they would probably only go to in the last seconds before an orgasm? The only thing is to push these kids into the dangerous state of ecstasy that parents and authority ate usually so careful to avoid.

'On your feet, everybody on your feet! Come on brothers and sisters, everybody get ready, 'cos we're going to mess with you!'

'That's right! We're going to mess with you!'

'Mess with you. Take you where you want to go. All right?'

There's a roar.

'All right!'

'Come on, louder.'

'All right!'

Connie runs round his drums, and, on the last beat, Mac cuts the feedback, and Jerry snaps into the intro of *Going to Mess With You.*

Hear me prowling -
Comin' round your door
Hear me growling
Know what I've come for.
Your parties and fancy connections
Leave me nothing to do.
I'm coming on fast
I'm coming on strong
Gonna mess with you.

Both guitars soar. The legacy of Elmore James, of Jimi Hendrix, is brought alive in that huge cavern of a hall. The band is really working as one, pushing it out. Mac, Jerry and I are right out by the footlights, moving, giving out. Flogging the audience with waves of sound, flailing with it until the chemistry finally comes to the boil. I think if I damaged myself right now, I wouldn't believe it.

Outside the window
Can't feel me getting near
Don't you feel the warning
Of the warm liquid fear
And those entertaining hoodlums
Won't be any help to you
There's no excuse
There's no escape
I'm gonna mess with you.

A little blonde with a suntan, blue jeans and a kind of backless T-shirt manages to get halfway up on to the stage but is hauled off by the rent-a-cops. As she's dragged away, her arms wave in a helpless signal. Me, me. Mess with me.

America came like a series of flashes, it was more than we'd ever had and further than we'd ever been[1] In England then was always time to come down to touch some sort of reality and regain our bearings. In the US, it just never happened For a start, we had no idea of geography and if we were in at apartment or a club, it was just a place, a random point in space. There was no relation to any other point. A vehicle would transport you somewhere else if you sat in it long enough. Beyond that we were just adrift.

The telephone was the only lifeline. The one thing to hold in your mind was to call the hotel. Let Eddie or Jimmy know where you were, and they'd organize a car to fetch you when you were needed for a show or an interview. Beyond that phone number it was just this long, twisting path of people we'd never seen before. All these people asking, wanting, offering. We came as objects exchanging our presence for whatever people wanted to give. The only way to save our brains was not to bother. Keep the card with the name and number of the hotel on it, and then just drift and let it happen. It was like that line from the Byrds, *Never touch bottom and keep falling through.* It was the only way to deal with America.

'You say there ain't no coke in London?'

'That's right, we were all into meth before we came here.'

'Shit. You'd better have a couple of lines of this. It's straight from Bolivia, it ain't been cut by anyone but the natives.'

'I got this sort of, like, thing about singers. Which hotel are you staying at?'

'Holiday Inn.'

'Driver, could you take us out to the Holiday Inn? I guess I'd dig to ball Mick Jagger out of anyone in the world, you know what I mean?'

'Hey man, there's these two chicks want to know if you and Jerry would like to go and see Curtis Mayfield and then go to a party at their place.'

'Where are they?'

'Down in the foyer.'

'What do they look like?'

'Okay.'

'They got a car?'

'I think so.'

'Okay, why not.'

'Want some of this acid?'

'I had this job as a Bunny in Chicago, but I got fired after about two weeks, when they caught me shooting speed in the toilet. They'll fire you for anything in those places. Smoking, talking to the customers. It's terrible. You can't imagine. Am I talking too much? Well, after that, I got this job as a topless waitress, but I quit after the first week, man. It was wretched. You wouldn't believe just how wretched it was, man. Oh wow. Those fucking creeps who go to those places. I was okay after that for a while because I moved in with this guy. Everyone called him the Professor because he manufactured meth and mescaline. He used to deal to all the bands, but then he began to get weird, you know. Carrying a piece about with him. In the end he caught me screwing this guitar player from Canada, and beat

me up. Hey, I know where we can score this really good crystal.'

'Wanna ball?'

'I borrowed my mother's Stingray, and I thought we could cruise out to the desert. It could be really fantastic, dig? All that sun, and nobody around for miles. Hey, I just thought, if your drummer wanted to come we could pick up my friend Candy. She's too much, and I know she really digs him.'

'Really man, I don't mind if you want to do that to me, in fact I'd really dig it. Only, you know, like don't leave any marks on my arms or legs because I got to model dresses tomorrow.'

'Have you ever met Eric Clapton?'
'You don't want to believe what you read in magazines about us.'
'I don't believe anything I read in magazines.'
'Right on. Have another beer. You really from England?'
'Sure.'
'Hey fellas, this dude's really from England. Me an' my brothers, we don't look for trouble. We just like to ride our bikes an' mind our own business. It's a very Zen trip, a warrior's trip. Fuckin' hippies don't understand it. Know what I mean?'
'Fucking hippies don't understand anything.'
'Too right, you want another beer?'

'You want a couple of these reds. Here, wash them down with this here Ripple.'

'No really man, I could just…. feel it, dig? I mean Dylan must have died, man…you know... I…it was the heavy trip behind psilocybin, you know…and, like I felt the whole weight of his trip… the whole mission… it came down on me…I just knew it man… he musta died…the guy they got now, man… it's just a CIA plot, man…that's why I have to keep hidden, man, or they'll get me too…but I'd dig for you to hear some of my songs.'

'Hey man, I found some of these in my pocket. You want some?'
'Sure, why not?'

'I got two sporting rifles, a repeater shotgun an' three handguns. When me and my old lady move out to the country nobody's going to fuck with us, I can tell you.'

'It's lunchtime.
'Really?'
'Want coffee?'
'No, I feel ill. Listen, I'm afraid I've forgotten your name.'
'Oh God, that's fantastic, really fantastic. Oh wow.'
'Fucking hippie creep, get your fucking hair cut.'

'What sign are you, man?'
'Scorpio.'
'Oh wow man, that's heavy.'
'Yeah?'
'Oh yeah. I'm a double Libra, but Scorpio. Wow man. That's really far out.'

‘Yeah?’
‘Oh yeah.’

‘Hey Lou, there’s some chick on the phone who wants to know if we want to go to a party at her place.’
‘Do we know her?’
‘Dunno.’
‘Where is it?’
‘She says it’s at Larch and Seventh.’
‘Where the fuck’s that?’
‘Fuck knows. I don’t even-know where we are.’

‘Wanna ball?’

‘...And tonight we’ve got the new English band that’s rocking them at Eagle’s ballroom, but before I talk to them here’s Charlie Weber with a few words about the bargains you can find at Harvey’s Auto-Mart...’

‘Have one of these, man.’
‘What are they?’
‘Dunno, I just found them in my pocket.’

‘Spare change?’

‘I tell you man, the people ain’t gonna take this shit for much longer man. The pigs gonna get stopped man. The people are arming man. They’re gonna tear down the whole fucking pig capitalist empire man. You better believe it, man, the time’s coming when everyone’s going to have to decide which side they’re gonna be on. It’s like Eldridge says, man, you either got to be part of the problem or part of the solution.’

‘Hey, let’s go out and cop amyl nitrate and a gun, hey.’

‘You wouldn’t believe what a chick has to put up with in this city, man. It’s just unreal. There are so many weirdos cruising round on the streets. I mean, just tonight, when I was coming over here,. this creep in a VW pulls up beside me and leans over. Then he leers and says, ten dollars to eat it. Well, I just went eek and rushed off. I mean, who needs that shit?’

'I tell you man, that fucking cunt ripped me off, man, He’s just a fucking thief, man. I’m going to find the motherfucker and kill him. I’m gonna fucking kill that cunt.’

‘Where am I?’
‘You came back here with me, after the party. Remember?’
‘Unh, yeah, I think so.’
‘You fucking ought to.’
‘Listen, I ought to get back to the hotel, I think we’ve got to catch a plane today.’
‘Yeah? Which hotel?’
‘Hang on, I think I’ve got it written down somewhere.’
‘Listen, it’ll be okay, I’ll drive you. Want some breakfast?’

‘Wanna ball?’

Although, at times, we thought it would never happen, things finally began to settle, and America produced its own level of normality. The wide streets, the flashing neon signs and the crisscrossing of overhead cables that did so much to change the perspectives of the country, no longer seemed alien, and even, gradually, became reassuring symbols of reality in the stoned kaleidoscope that we were living in.

Of all places, it was Los Angeles where our feet finally touched the ground and we began to catch up with ourselves. We played the Whiskey A Go-Go for two hectic nights, and then we actually found that we had a-week off before we were due to fly back to London. The gigs at the Whiskey had provided us with all the connections we needed, and the motel had become a kind of non-stop party, a constant procession of chicks and dope dealers coming by to check us out.

The first day of the holiday, I did my best to wake up slowly. There had been a crazed party in Jerry's room where we had all swallowed too many downers, all except one heavily built chick who insisted on prancing about and filling herself up with booze and speed, and romping about naked, offering to give head to anyone who looked in her direction. I could remember wondering hazily if the amount of semen she swallowed was the cause of her being overweight.

I opened one eye very cautiously, wondering who or what was occupying the rest of the bed. A bare shoulder formed in my field of vision. To get any clue to the identity of the owner, I would have to sit up. I moved my head, and it hurt, so I lay still for a while longer until the pain subsided. Then I sat up in easy stages, and after I'd got used to having my head higher than my feet, I leaned over to see who the chick was.

I saw to my horror that somehow I'd managed to wind up with the heavyweight from the night before. Awake, she'd looked pretty unappetizing, but asleep she looked fat and self satisfied.

I moved my hand towards her with the intention of waking her, then I hesitated. Maybe it was better to leave her asleep for a while. I slid out of the bed, and headed for the shower. I ducked under the hot water, and after letting it run down my body for a while, I flicked it to cold for as long as I could stand, which was about four seconds, and emerged feeling the closest thing to healthy that I'd felt in weeks.

As I towelled myself I strolled across to the bed and peered at the chick. How the hell had I managed to get involved with her? She was still asleep, slack-mouthed and ugly. The memory of her loud-mouthed stupidity the night before flooded back. A tightness in the back of my neck told me that I had to get rid of her. I was almost dry, and I lit a cigarette. Maybe I should split and let Eddie get rid of her, but I doubted if any of the others would be up, and even if they were, I didn't really feel that eager to start into the party so early in the day. It looked as though the only way I was going to get her out of my room was to do it myself.

I pulled the covers off her, but there didn't seem to be enough cold in the California air to wake her. To go further while still wandering around naked seemed to put me at too much of a disadvantage. I pulled on my trousers and picked up the wet towel from the floor. I flicked it hard at the broad expanse of her arse. She jerked, and opened her eyes.

'What the fuck…?'

'Get up. It's time you weren't here.'

She began hauling the covers back over herself.

'Ah c'mon man, I'm tired, let me sleep.'

'Just get up, okay. Get up, get dressed and split.'

She buried her face in the pillow.

'You're full of shit, man. I been on the road for years, man, and right now I want to sleep.'

There was an unbearable tightness at the back of my neck. I did my best to hold down my

temper.

'Will you get out of my bed?'

She sat up scowling, her voice had taken on an unpleasant whine.

'What's the matter with you, man? You were eager enough to get me in here last night when you wanted your prick sucked.'

It all began to get too much.

'Up!'

'Listen . .

'Getup!'

'Listen motherfucker, don't I even get any coffee or nothing?'

There was the Indian knife that I had bought in Seattle, lying on the dressing table. I grabbed it and pulled it out of its sheath.

'Get up you fucking pig or I'll carve my initials on your I arse!'

She scrambled out of bed and began frantically gathering up her clothes.

'Okay, okay, take it easy, I'm going.

I turned my back as she forced her lumpy body into the tight dress. The elastic of her panties made little rolls of fat at the tops of her legs, and the idea of my having spent the night with her made my flesh creep.

She collected up all her things and headed for the door.

With one hand on the handle she turned and flashed me a hard bitch Janis Joplin look.

'You know something man, you're fucking crazy. Being on the road has turned your mind.'

I still had the knife in my hand and I took a couple of steps towards her, but before I got there, the door shut quickly and she was gone. I flopped down on the bed and lit another cigarette.

To say it was all getting out of hand was an understatement. We weren't just skating on thin ice, we were right out in the middle of the lake, miles from the bank. There was no chance of slowing down and getting our bearings, that would be a disaster. We just had to keep rushing headlong and hope that sheer speed would carry us through. In America all ideas of home or security had faded. It was just a stream of faces and motel rooms, and as long as the stream kept on going, we were safe. If it stopped, we were dead.

I lay there for a long while wondering about the situation we had got ourselves into, what exactly we were doing in this motel in Los Angeles. Inside myself I didn't feel any different from the way I'd felt in school or in college, and yet, like the chick I'd just thrown out of the room, people seemed constantly to accuse us of being crazy, of being weird. There was the guy who sent us the threatening letter back in London, he obviously thought we were actually dangerous. It was uncanny, the way people paid good money to hear us, to see us, even to look at our pictures in magazines. I didn't feel curious or strange, and the rest of the band looked quite normal to me. I wondered where all those people's heads could be at. I couldn't even get inside Sally's head and find out why she had grown to hate us all, and no matter how much I tried it was impossible to work out what the audience was getting from us. Sure there was a certain amount of sex and violence. To a greater or lesser extent that was part of every rock and roll band. It was true that in our American shows we were getting wilder than we had ever been in England, and kids seemed to dig it and come back for more. All this didn't, however, answer the question of why us. Was it just hype and promotion, or were we really people who were set apart from the rest of the herd?

My cigarette was finished and I ground out the stub. I lay staring at the ceiling for a while, and then called room service for breakfast.

As I put the phone down someone knocked on the door.

'Who is it?'

'The beast from twenty thousand fathoms.'

‘Come in, it’s open.’

Jerry and Connie walked in looking healthier than they deserved to be.

‘You look down.’

‘It’s nothing.’

‘Didn’t you have a good time with that big buxom bird?’

‘Don’t even talk about it.’

‘That bad?’

‘She was a pig. I don’t even remember bringing her back here.’

‘She was pretty gross.’

‘You’re not kidding, it was a real shock when I woke up this morning with her snoring beside me. It was like finding out that I spent the night with Chas.’

Jerry glanced at Connie.

‘Sounds like this boy’s in need of medication.’

Connie nodded and produced a tiny silver foil package from his shirt pocket.

‘You better have a snort before it gets any worse.’

He picked up my knife, took down the mirror from the bathroom, and divided up the pile of coke in six even lines.

‘Got a note?’

I searched through my jacket and found a ten dollar bill. I rolled it into a tight cylinder, bent over the mirror and hoovered one of the lines into each nostril. It was good cocaine and my nose hardly burned at all, The rush went through my head and the doubts were scattered by a feeling of power, pride and well being. Fuck it, maybe we were different, maybe we were fucking superior. It’s easy to see why Hitler was a coke head.

I grinned.

‘I really needed that.’

Jerry nodded.

‘We thought we ought to get you together. Jimmy called and said he was coming over. He was muttering about how he had something important to tell us.’

‘What?’

‘He wouldn’t tell me over the phone, you know how he always comes on mysterious.’

‘Maybe he wants to have us all killed so our memorial albums sell millions.’

‘Have you heard his theories about...?’

‘...Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly? Yeah, many an oft. He becomes quite fanatical in his paranoid fantasies.’

‘It’s the way he stands right next to you and hisses. He’s a natural born conspirator.’

Jerry laughed.

‘Maybe he was conceived in some terrible illicit affair.’ Connie looked serious.

‘I’ve got a feeling we’re going to get a progress report on the tour finances.’

‘I bet he’s going to tell us we’ve lost money.’ I glanced at Jerry.

‘You think so? It’s been looking all right to me. The halls are full and we seem to be going down well enough.’

Jerry shrugged.

‘Okay, but I still reckon he’ll discover all kinds of hidden overheads. I don’t know about you guys, but I’d really dig to know-a great deal more than I do about what happens to our money.’

It was my turn to shrug.

‘I can do without all those hassles. We seem to be doing all right.’

But Jerry didn’t seem able to leave it alone. He moved towards the threshold of indignation each time we talked about Jimmy.

‘Sure we’re doing all right on a day to day level, but how come we don’t have any real

money? That's the point I'd dig to start thinking about some good wheels and a pad in the country. I mean, fuck it, we ought to be making enough money.'

Connie lay back on my bed.

'This is all getting too paranoid. All we've got to do is to go round the office when we're back in London, and ask to see the figures.'

He raised his head.

'Listen Lou, we gave you our coke so how about you rolling a joint?'

'We'd better hold on, the bellhop will be along with my breakfast any minute.'

Connie laughed.

'Have you seen the bellhop?'

I shook my head.

'No.'

'He's got hair down to his waist, and looks like he'd be well pleased to come in for a blow.'

I unearthed my dope, and pulled out some skins.

'I'll say one thing for Jimmy, he seems to have a great knack for putting us in cool hotels.'

Jerry nodded.

'Sure, what I'd like to know is how come he never stays in the same place as we do.'

There was a tap on the door, and the breakfast arrived. As Connie had predicted, the bellhop was happy to come in and smoke a joint with us. The breakfast was the typical American big deal, orange juice, bacon, sausage, eggs, pancakes, toast, coffee, and Jerry and Connie both began picking at it despite my protests.

'So they want us to stay for another four weeks.'

When Jimmy had arrived, we'd all gathered in Connie's room, sent out for booze and then settled down to listen to Jimmy's revelations. As it turned out, we were doing very well. Our first album was in at number sixty in the Billboard hot hundred LPs, and various promoters wanted us to do return gigs before we went home to London. It was all very exciting and, despite the suspicion about how our money was being handled, even Jerry seemed pleased.

'It looks as though we've cracked it in America then?'

Mac looked questioningly at Jimmy.

'Do you think that it'll follow the same pattern as in England?'

Jimmy shook his head.

'Not exactly. I mean, for a start, we're not really hitting the singles market. We're making it on FM radio and the big hippie rock ballrooms. It's the older kids who are buying our stuff. The average single buyer in the US is about nine years old and totally locked into bubble gum. I don't think there's any need to worry about singles, but it will be a bit different to back home. One thing you can be sure of, though, the word's going round that you're a hot band.'

Jerry glanced round the room, avoiding Jimmy's eyes.

'How are we doing for bread?'

'Fine, with this extra four weeks, the whole tour should show a good profit.'

'So there'll be some spare cash when we get back to London?'

'There should be.'

Jerry stopped his inspection of the room, and stared intently at Jimmy.

'We've been talking, and it... err... emerges that we'd like to have a better idea of how our money is being handled.'

Jimmy smiled. It was that deceptive cold smile that he so often adopted when he felt he was being pushed.

'Are you boys trying to put me up against the wall?'

Connie once again slid into his role of mediator.

'We're not putting you up against no walls. It's just that, well, you know, if we're going to make it in the States, we'd like to know more about our finances.'

Jimmy spread out his hands, that old conciliatory gesture.

'What do you want me to do? You can come over and go through the books when we get back to London. I don't know what else can be done.'

We all nodded in agreement. All, that is, except Jerry, who seemed determined to push the point as far as he could.

'You've got to understand, Jimmy. If we're making it in America that's going to involve lots of bread, and if there's lots of bread flashing about, I want to know what's happening to it. I want to know in some detail.'

'Are you trying to tell me you don't trust me?'

'Sure, I don't trust anybody. Are you going to tell me I'm wrong?'

Jimmy's mouth twisted into a half grin.

'Not me, man.'

'Okay then.'

'Okay, but just remember one thing. You may be the big shot rock star, and you may have suddenly become very paranoid about what's happening to your money, but don't forget it was me who found you when you were punks, it was me who laid the bread on you to get yourselves together, and it was me who made you into what you are now. There's still a lot that car happen to you, so don't come on too strong.'

Jerry took a deep breath, but before he could say anything Connie jumped in as peacemaker.

'Sure, sure, we know what you've done for us, Jimmy. All Jerry wants is a clearer idea of what's going on. There's one thing that's bothering me. If we stay in America for another month, will we get back in time for the free concert?'

Jerry nodded, he seemed relieved to get off the subject of money.

'Yeah, yeah, I fixed everything so we finish up the tour and then have eight days free in London before we do the park.'

'We're going to be fucking psychotic after another month here.'

'A good rest of eight days should be enough to get your heads together, shouldn't it?'

'Ask us when we've done the extra month.'

Within two hours of checking into our hotel in Chicago, Steve Novak had turned up. His come-on was that he was working for some radio station or other, but within two hours all talk about radio was forgotten and we were busily snorting his coke and thinking what a fine fellow he was.

Stevie Novak was like a strip cartoon, he was a gross parody of the fifties punk greaser. His hair was a double-size replica of Little Richard's piled high on his head like black ice cream, while the face underneath was white and pinched like a paranoid weasel trying to look like Bob Dylan. His skinny body was done up in jive chic denims, a tight Marlon Brando black motorcycle jacket, and the kind of expensive cowboy boots that you can't get outside of Texas.

He had a smart line in flip coke head patter and the kind of hipmanship that meant if you talked about Jeff Beck, he began rapping about Luther Allison. I guess if the dope thing hadn't come to town he probably would have been a pimp. The solid ease with which he sucked us in was a joy to watch. We'd only known him for a matter of three hours before he was telling us about the big fat nigger lady who was his southside connection.

'I tell you man, she looks just like Aunt Jemima, and it must cost her a hundred grand a year to keep her nose open...'

We were all sitting there with our tongues hanging out.

'I mean, no shit, she has such coke man, these fucking rocks the size of your thumb. Like, it'd be kind of hard to do business with her except she has this, you know, old time nigger thing about young white dudes, so it isn't too bad.'

Jerry was studying the ceiling.

'Listen man ... I don't suppose you could cop some of this fine charlie for us, could you?'

Stevie Novak shrugged. It was the same kind of hustler shrug that Jimmy used. They probably both learned it from Rod Steiger in *Al Capone.*

'It depends. how much you want, man. I mean, it ain't worth going to see her for no lousy spoon.'

Jerry turned to the rest of us.

'I don't know what you lads think, but it occurred to me that we might cop enough coke to see us through the rest of the tour. It'd save us a whole lot of bread.'

We all nodded.

'Sure, why not?'

He turned back to Stevie.

'What would an ounce cost us?'

'Seven hundred, maybe.'

We'd never bought coke in any kind of quantity and we didn't really know what to say. Jerry did his best to bluff it out.

'Isn't that a bit high, man?'

Stevie shrugged again.

'Not for Chicago.'

'What's the coke going to be like?'

'Same as you've been snorting.'

Mac looked round at the rest of us.

'Well, that was all right.'

'So shall we do it?'

'Might as well.'

'Where do we get the seven hundred from?'

'Eddie.'

'Eddie?'

'Sure, Eddie's holding a float. He should be cool.'

'What room is he in?'

'Seven one two.'

Jerry picked up the phone.

'Could you put me through to seven one two, please? - Hello Eddie, listen, have you got some cash - Have you got a spare seven hundred? — That's right, seven hundred, seven nought nought. — Don't worry about what it's for, can you bring it up to Lou's room right now? Great.'

He put down the phone and grinned.

'He's coming up with it.'

He turned to Novak.

'How long will it take you to get it together?'

'Are you playing tonight?'

'No.'

'I could be back in about four hours.'

'Great.'

There was a buzz, and Mac let Eddie in.

‘What do you crazy fuckers want with seven hundred dollars?’
Jerry grinned innocently.
‘To buy some coke with.’
‘Seven hundred dollars’ worth of cocaine?’
‘We thought we’d buy in bulk, and cut out the middle man.’
Eddie gestured towards Novak.
‘Has this cat got it?’
‘He’s going to fetch it.’
‘You’re giving him the money?’
‘Yeah.’
He looked at us doubtfully.
‘Are you sure about that?’
We all turned towards Novak. After a pause Jerry nodded.
‘Yeah, we’ll take a chance.’
Eddie grimaced.
‘Rather you than me, but if you sign for the bread then I’m covered.’
He passed a cash slip to Jerry, who scribbled his name on it, and then he handed over the seven hundred. Jerry gave it to Novak.
‘You’ll be back here in four hours?’
‘Sure, if nothing goes wrong.’
‘Nothing had better go wrong.’
‘Sure, sure. Don’t worry.’
He moved towards the door.
‘See you guys later.’
‘Yeah, later.’
After he had gone Connie got up and poured himself a drink.
‘Think we’ve been ripped off?’
‘Dunno, he seemed a nice enough guy.’
‘That’s what they always say about con men.’
‘I suppose all we can do is wait and see if he comes back.’
We waited, and of course the obvious happened. Four hours passed and there was no Novak. The whole evening went by, and finally we all went to bed without any cocaine. There was no sign of him the next morning, and by lunchtime we had to admit that we’d been turned over. Jimmy and Eddie gave us a going over for being so stupid as to hand over a loaf of bread without seeing the goods, and we spent the next day feeling small and dumb.
I suppose we would have never seen Novak again, except for one flaw in his makeup. Apart from being a thief, he was also a groupie, and couldn’t resist the temptation of showing up at a concert.
We were booked for three days in Chicago, and it was just after we’d finished the second set that we saw him. We’d packed up all our stuff and were just making our way out of the auditorium, when who should pop out of the dressing room of the American support band but Stevie Novak. Before he could hurry away, we surrounded him.
‘Hello Stevie.’
‘Uh... hi fellas. Listen, there’s been a bit of a holdup with your stuff. I ...’
Jerry put his arm round Novak’s shoulder.
‘Don’t worry about it, man. It’ll come together.’
‘Yeah, yeah. That’s what I’m telling you, it’s just taking longer than I thought.’
Jerry beamed at him. It was that bland rattlesnake smile. If he’d done it to me, I’d have run a mile, but Stevie Novak didn’t know any better. Jerry put an arm round his shoulder.
‘Don’t worry about it man, get it together when you can.’

‘Yeah sure, I’m really sorry about the delay.’

‘I said don’t worry about it. Listen, come up to the hotel and blow a couple of joints.’

Novak looked a bit twitchy and made a half-hearted attempt to get away from Jerry.

‘I’d love to, fellas, but I got a bit of business to attend to and...’

Jerry started to manoeuvre him towards the stage door exit.

‘You’ve got time, man. Just relax.’

Novak shrugged.

‘Well…okay, maybe for an hour or so, but then I gotta go hustle.’

We loaded Novak into one of the cars, and headed back to the hotel. He looked uncomfortable but tried to keep up a jovial line of unconcerned bonhomie. This continued as we flanked him through the lobby, and up in the lift. Once inside Mac’s room we all kind of spread out, Jerry turned and began examining the wall. Novak went on trying to bluff it out.

‘Listen fellas. I really shouldn’t stay too long, like I said I...’

Jerry interrupted him.

‘You ripped us off, motherfucker.’

His voice was so light and conversational that it took a few seconds for it to register. Novak’s mouth opened to protest, but before he could speak Jerry swung round and smashed him across the face with the back of his hand. Novak staggered back, his lip bleeding where one of Jerry’s rings had caught it. He lurched back into me, and I caught him. Almost as reflex response I spun him round and pushed him hard towards Connie. Connie caught him and shoved him towards Steve, Steve threw him towards Mac and Mac heaved him back to Jerry. After two rounds of the game of catch, Mac tripped Novak and he fell to the floor. Jerry stood over him.

‘Where’s our seven hundred?’

Novak looked up at him, dabbing at his mouth with the back of his hand.

‘You’re fucking crazy man. Like I told you, there’s…unh.’

Jerry kicked him hard in the stomach.

‘Where’s our seven hundred, cunt?’

‘I told you...no!’

Jerry kicked him again. Novak tried to climb to his feet but Jerry hacked at him with the heel of his boot and he flopped face down on the carpet. Jerry lit a cigarette. The whole scene was beginning to get like something out of a George Raft movie.

‘Okay, let’s try again, Stevie. For the last time, where is our seven hundred dollars?’

‘I told you...’

‘Bullshit.’

‘Unh... listen.’

‘Yeah?’

‘I… don’t have it.’

‘Why not?’

‘I. . . I blew it. No stop, don’t kick me again.’

‘Why not?’

‘Whadda ya mean?’

‘Why shouldn’t I kick you? You ripped off our bread, why shouldn’t we make you suffer?’

‘Listen, I’ll get your bread back. Believe me.’

‘When?’

‘In a couple of days.’

‘That’s no good, we’ve only got another day in Chicago.’

Novak made another attempt to get up, but Jerry put his foot on the back of his neck and slammed him back on to the floor. Novak’s voice came out muffled by the carpet.

‘I could maybe raise the bread inside of twenty-four hours.’

‘You suggesting we should let you out of here again?’
‘I’d have to go out and get the bread.’
‘I don’t think that’d be too satisfactory.’
‘Fuck man! What else can I do?’
‘How much money have you got on you?’
‘About a hundred and fifty.’
‘Give it to me.’
‘You’ll have to let me stand up.’
Jerry nodded.
‘Okay, get up.’
Novak climbed painfully to his feet. clutching his stomach.
‘Okay, the bread.’
Novak fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a bundle of bills.
‘Here, that’s all I got.’
Jerry motioned to Steve.
‘Have a look through his pockets.’
Steve quickly went through Novak’s clothes.
‘That’s all, except for a bit of change.’
Jerry counted the bills.
‘There’s one forty here. That leaves another five sixty. What else have you got?’
‘Nothing.’
‘Watch?’
‘No.’
‘Jewellery?’
‘I don’t have any.’
‘Okay then, take off your jacket.’
‘My jacket?’
‘You heard me.’
Novak stripped off his jacket and handed it to Jerry, who tossed it on to the bed.
‘Now your boots.’
Novak looked down at his fancy cowboy boots.
‘Come on, you gotta be kidding.’
‘Take your fucking boots off.’
‘How the fuck do you get out of here without boots?’
‘Hippies like walking around barefoot. It’s so much more natural.’
Novak bent down and pulled off his boots. He threw them on the floor at Jerry’s feet.
‘Okay, there! Is that all?’
Jerry stared at him.
‘I don’t think you have much else left. It ain’t anything like seven hundred dollars though.’
‘So can I go?’
Jerry nodded.
‘Yeah, split, and remember that ripping off rock bands isn’t always easy money.’

From Chicago we flew to Seattle, and played two fairly uneventful nights there. After Seattle, we crossed the border into Canada, to play one concert at a place with the unlikely name of the Agridome.

After the show, Connie and I hooked up with some local musicians, and after some heavy drinking and doping, we wound up in a hippie bar on Fourth Avenue, where a bunch of guys were switching around jamming on some old equipment. I watched the jam for a while, and was surprised by the high standard of playing among these people.

Connie and I ordered something to eat, and there seemed to be an abundance of joints, pipes of hash and bottles wrapped in paper bags covertly circulating. It was really good to be away from planes, dressing rooms and hotels, and relax into this pleasant funky scene.

After we'd eaten, the guys who were with us began coming on to us to get up a blow with the band. I glanced at Connie.

'Feel like getting up to do something?'

Connie looked round.

'Sure, why not?'

'Okay then.'

We made our way to the little stage, and the guy playing drums stood up and handed his sticks to Connie. There was a ripple of applause as Connie sat down and tapped speculatively at the small drum kit. I went into a huddle with the two guitarists and the bass player.

'What do you want to play?'

'Dunno man, what do you fancy?'

I thought for a minute. It is a problem when you get up to jam, nobody ever seems to know exactly what to play.

'How about *Smokestack Lightning?'*

One of the guitar players played a snatch of the riff.

'Okay, I can dig it.'

'Want to play *Smokestack Lightning***,** Connie?'

He nodded.

'Might as well. I ain't played that for years.'

The jam stretched to about forty-five minutes, a harmonica player joined us, and we had two changes of guitarist. It felt really good, just playing for a bunch of freaks and musicians. Blowing straight old fashioned R & B, without the need to throw myself around and put on a show.

Not that we weren't really rocking, but the whole thing was relaxed and easy, a lot of solos, and a jug of applejack on top of the stack of beat up amplifiers. Joints kept going past, and at the end of *Smokestack Lightning* the small bar rattled with applause. The guitar player grinned at us.

'More?'

'Sure.'

'Memphis Tennessee in G?'

'Great.'

We bounced off into *Memphis.*

Long distance information
Get me Memphis Tennessee,
Help me find the party.
Tried to get in touch with me.

It lasted for another twenty minutes, and then we got signals from the owner, a retired biker, that he either had to close up for the night, or get busted.

We finished off the song and I looked at Connie.

'What do we do now?'

There'd been this little chick with tiny breasts and curly blond hair who'd been eyeing me speculatively while we'd been playing. It seemed to be time to make contact, but I needed to know what Connie was thinking of doing.

'Just hang out, see what presents itelf.'

That was exactly the answer I wanted to hear. I turned to the dudes we had come with.

'So what's happening now?'

Before they could answer, the little blonde chick had slipped between them.

‘There’s a party at Murray’s.’
The guys we came with looked at each other.
‘Fucking right, we could go over there.’
I put my arm round the girl.
‘Will you be going to this party?’
‘Sure.’
‘How you getting there?’
‘Dunno. Ain’t you got no wheels?’
‘No, we left the car with the rest of the band.’
One of the cats we’d been playing with interrupted.
‘If you hang on here a while, I’ll organize some wheels.’
I sat down on the edge of the stage, and the little chick sat down beside me. It seemed as though she was now firmly attached. I smiled at her.
‘What’s your name?’
‘Lynette, people call me Lyn, for short.’
‘Mine’s Lou.’
She nodded.
‘Yeah. I know. I was at your show tonight.’
‘Did you like it?’
‘Oh yeah, really. I’ve got one of your albums.’
‘Too much.’
Although she had come on fast, she didn’t seem to have the hard veneer of most of the groupies we’d met.
The musicians came back in before I could talk to Lyn any more.
‘Car’s outside.’
‘Yeah?’
We followed them outside and piled into a battered Chevy, drove about ten blocks and arrived at the party.
It was one of those little two-storey wooden buildings with a porch and a stone cellar. Just the kind they have in situation comedy shows, only in this case, the porch and front yard were covered with milling freaks.
I’d noticed a couple of police cars parked two blocks away. It looked as though they were keeping an eye on the scene, but were unwilling to get any closer. It seemed a good relationship.
We piled out of the car and elbowed our way through the crowd of freaks. Connie and I really stood out in our London velvet, among all these Canadians in their Davy Crockett outfits. Standing out had an advantage, we were noticed, talked to and handed bottles and joints. Lyn stuck close by my side as we made our way to the porch.
Inside the front door there were a bunch of bikers, drinking beer, punching each other and going hee-haw. We tried to skirt them quietly, but they noticed us.
‘Hey look at those dudes!’
‘Hey, you guys faggots?’
‘Not usually.’
‘You from Los Angeles?’
We shook our heads.
‘London.’
‘London? No shit, what you doing here?’
Lyn hugged my arm.
‘They’re musicians.’
‘Musicians. Fuck, you gonna play some music for this here party?’

‘I dunno, there’s only two of us, and I don’t know if there are any instruments.’
‘Oh, Murray’ll get it together.’
He leered at Lyn.
‘Listen jailbait, you tell your boyfriend to play us some music. Okay?’
He directed his attention back to me.
‘What kind of music do you play in London anyway?’
‘Rock and roll.’
‘Yeah? Like the Rolling Stones?’
‘Something like that.’
‘Fuckin’ too much. You better make sure you play us some music, right?’
‘We’ll do our best.’
‘Okay.’
It seemed as though we were dismissed, and we started to move away but they called us back.
‘Hey London.’
‘Yeah?’
He tossed a couple of beer cans at us.
‘Here, have a beer, and don’t forget to play for us.’

Lyn and I split from the party at about four-thirty. Connie had left about a half hour earlier with-a dark haired chick in a see through blouse and Levis.
There had been some guys jamming in the basement, and we’d discharged our obligation to the bikers, but after that I was exhausted and felt I really had to split. We pushed our way out of the crowd and walked a couple of blocks.
‘Shall we go back to my hotel?’
Lyn pressed her face against my arm.
‘Can we go to my place please?’
‘Yes, of course. How far is it?’
‘We’ll have to take a cab. There’s a pay phone on the corner, I can call one from there.’
It took about ten minutes, and we kissed each other in the light of the phone booth.
Her pad was in one of four old houses on a lot of land sandwiched between two high-rise office buildings on the edge of the downtown area.
It was all stripped pine furniture and psychedelic posters, and , despite the clothes littered everywhere, it had an air of money and good taste. She slipped out of her coat and looked round.
‘Shit, what a mess.’
She scurried round, gathered up an armful of clothes abd dumped them out of sight. Then she lit a candle and turned off the electric light.
‘There. That’s a whole lot better. Would you like some hot chocolate?’
‘Yes, that’d be really nice.’
‘Okay then, why don’t you get into bed and I’ll bring it to you.’
‘Wonderful.’
She went into the tiny kitchen and got busy with the pots and pans, while I gratefully took off my clothes and sank into the folds of her big brass bed. A few minutes later she emerged from the kitchen carrying two mugs of chocolate. She grinned.
‘I’m afraid I haven’t got any marshmallows.’
I laughed.
‘I’ll try and survive.’
She handed me my mug and put hers on the bedside table. Unbuttoned her shirt, slipped out of her jeans and perched on the edge of her bed sipping her chocolate. She was boyish, with

almost no breasts at all. I put down my mug and reached out and stroked one of them.

'Mmm, that's nice.'

She put down her own mug and stretched out beside me. I put a hand on her hip and eased off her panties. Her pubic hair was blond and amazingly sparse, as though she had at one time shaved it.

I went down on her and she moaned with pleasure. After a while, I moved up and indicated that she should return the compliment. She was enthusiastic, but unlike most of the girls I'd met in the States, very inexpert.

After a busy couple of minutes I pulled her up and kissed her, and began moving towards entering her. She clutched at me.

'Please be gentle, I'm still very small down there.'

I licked her ear.

'Sure pet, I'll be careful.'

It was weird. She seemed to fuck really tentatively. I couldn't understand why she held back so much.

After it was over and we lay huddled together it all suddenly fell into place. I raised my head.

'How old are you?

She grinned.

'Thirteen.'

'Jesus.'

'What's the matter? Don't young girls turn you on?'

I lay back and stared at the ceiling.

'I don't know, it's all very sudden. It didn't really connect until just now.'

She stroked me.

'Was I all right?'

'Yeah great. You'll be terrific when you're fifteen.'

She pouted.

'That's what they all say.'

'You do this often?'

'Sure, I dig balling, and I dig rock musicians.'

'But what about your parents?'

'Oh, they're divorced. They rent this place for me, and give me an allowance.'

'Do you go to school?'

'Fuck no. I just hang out.'

'Shit.'

I shook my head in amazement, but before I could say anything else she started to play with my prick.

'Can we do it again before we go to sleep? I mean, I need all the practice I can get.'

We did it again.

I had a lot of trouble sleeping as a terrible paranoia began to grow in my brain. I tried to remember what kind of terrible fate the Canadians had reserved for child molesters. Each time a car went by outside I had visions of the combined nark and vice squad rushing in and finding me, my stash and the thirteen-year-old yummy. Memories of those bands who never toured America again after statutory rape scenes. By ten o'clock, I'd had enough. I made some excuse about having to make a call to London, and began to get dressed. She looked very sad and vulnerable.

'Will you write to me from London?'

'Of course I will.'

By the time we got to New York, the last stop before home, we were exhausted and on the verge of psychosis. Jerry had taken to questioning in minute detail everything anyone outside the band had to say, which caused a lot of confusion with air hostesses and hotel staff. We seemed to be locked together in a kind of little anarchist whirlwind where the only safe place was the absolute centre.

We were held together by the single fact that we were the only people in that desperate, weird state, and as such we had to stick to each other and keep on doing it. Our rooms at the Chelsea became a non-stop circus that resembled a scene from *Blonde on Blonde.* The procession of New York faces grinning, nodding, dribbling became a background when all else swirled in vision tunnels.

New York seemed, for us, to be composed of hungry searching eyes ringed with makeup and sparkle and always coming in at us. Always wanting, hungry for energy, charisma, flesh. We started dividing them into types, the dope-fiends who sat in our armchairs spreading out with their pills and powders and tanks of nitrous oxide, the genital gang whose hands seemed to be grasping for famous flesh, and the watchers, the ones who came and did nothing, who seemed to get their buzz from just being where it was happening.

One night, when the circus got too much for us, Jerry and I split for Steve Paul's scene, which was still open in those days, to rest our heads.

We ducked inside the swinging doors, and our fame must have spread, because some dude on the door lifted up one of those velvet ropes and let us in without any hassle. We made our way into the main room, found a table in a dark corner and sank down behind our Jack Daniels. It was nice to sit in the dark and let the eyes miss us for a while.

But they didn't miss us for long. A couple of chicks came and sat at the next table giving us very obvious vibes that they knew who we were and that they were ready to do it for us. Jerry began insulting them with *'I'm a rock and roll star so what do you do that I should talk to you'* jive, and the chicks seemed prepared to sit and take it. I lost interest. I knew I'd get fucked by something tonight, and there seemed no reason to work on it so early.

My eyes wandered round the room until finally my attention came to rest on a knot of the Jewish mafia at a table near the stage. One of them detached himself and, to my surprise, came over to where we were sitting.

'Do you mind if I join you for a minute?'

I was too curious to make any smart remarks.

'Uh... no.'

He sat down.

'You're two of this band Willy's Rats, aren't you?'

I glanced round at the girls. They seemed impressed, so it was obvious this guy was no sensation-seeking hick. I had to admit he looked too heavy to be a nothing. He was middle-aged and portly in a dignified, Orson Welles sort of way. He had small half glasses, and his grey hair was longer in the back than was usual with a man of his age. He offered his hand.

'I'm glad I've met you. My name's Sydney Gutman.'

I shook his hand in a state of shock.

'I'm Lou Francis, and this is Jerry Deacon.'

Jerry also shook hands. He looked as amazed as I was. Sydney Gutman was one of the giant super managers. A big league rock mogul. My head was going round, what the fuck did he want with us? We didn't have to wait long. He ordered some more drinks, then leaned forward so he could be heard above the music.

'I don't have much time, because I'm with some people. Your band seems to be attracting a good deal of attention, and I'm interested to know whether your present management situation is satisfactory.'

Jerry looked at me, and then at Gutman.

‘Only up to a point.’
‘Who is your current manager?’
‘Jimmy DiAngelo.’
Gutman pressed his fingertips together.
‘I see. Do you know much about your finances?’
Jerry paused.
‘Very little.’
Gutman studied his drink.
‘Then really all I can say is that I’d suggest to you that you make a detailed examination of them, and, if you’re not happy about anything, please get in touch with me.’
We both nodded dumbly. Gutman smiled and stood up.
‘I’ll wish you good night, then.’
‘Yes.., good night.’
After he had gone back to his table, I turned and stared at Jerry.
‘Was that for real?’
‘It’s certainly Sydney Gutman.’
‘Jesus! Making overtures to us.’
‘Boggles the mind.’
‘What do you think about it?’
‘I think it’s the ideal answer. With Sydney Gutman handling us, we couldn’t go wrong. We could be the biggest fucking thing in the world.’
‘What about Jimmy?’
‘What about him, we’ve got to elbow him, that’s all there is to it.’
‘It might not be as easy as that. He could get pretty vicious about it. I wouldn’t fancy walking into Jimmy’s office and telling him that he was getting blown out.’
Jerry shook his head impatiently.
‘You’re not thinking, man. It’s not our problem to get rid of Jimmy. If Gutman wants to manage us, the first job for him is to sort out Jimmy. Right?’
‘Yeah, I suppose so. I could just see Jimmy getting a bit mean about it. We’d better talk to the others though.’
‘Obviously, but we want to be careful of one thing.’
‘What’s that?’
‘There mustn’t be a word of this to anyone outside the band. Not even Chas or Eddie. It’d be really bad if Jimmy got any warning of what we. were up to.’
I nodded.
‘That’s true.’

I stayed in bed for almost the whole first week that we were back in London. Physically I was exhausted, and my brain was totally numb. The rest of the band were in a similar state, and Jerry, Connie and I drifted round the pad like a set of zombies. It was only Ruth looking after us that kept the three of us together at all.

Ruth seemed to have become permanent house-mother to the band. Usually sleeping with one of us, first it had been me, then Jerry, and at this time Connie, but looking after all of us while we were in London, and taking care of the pad when we were away. If anyone had wanted to analyze the situation, they could have concocted some strange group marriage theory, but nobody paid that much attention to it. I suppose in our own way, we all loved Ruth. The most important thing was that she was there, and we didn’t think much beyond that.

The morning of the free concert dawned bright and clear, which filled us all with a

profound sense of relief. Our great fear had been of the whole thing being rained off. It was the first day that we'd really got ourselves out of bed since we'd come back from America.

Chas called us from a pub near the park at about twelve, and told us that the stage and equipment were ready, that there was already a huge crowd of kids waiting for the concert to start, and that we should arrive at about three in order to play just before four. It was Connie who talked to him, and after he'd relayed the information, Jerry stubbed out his cigarette and stood up.

'I suppose we ought to think about getting dressed.'

I looked up from the paper.

'That's a point. What are you two going to wear?'

Connie put a hand on his hip and twitched his arse.

'Me pink tulle with the hand sewn sequins.'

'No seriously. All this open air and sunshine seems a bit strong for stage clothes.'

Jerry nodded.

'I was thinking of something like my faded denims, shades and a lot of danglies. Kind of high class funk. I think that's the right sort of approach.'

I glanced at Connie.

'What about you?'

'I'm not bothered. It'll be too hot to play in a shirt anyway.'

'I think I'll wear my white suit then.'

Jerry laughed.

'You'll look like fucking Colonel Sanders.'

While we were getting ready, Jimmy called. I found that I had difficulty talking to Jimmy since the conversation with Gutman, but I'd picked up the phone, and was stuck with it. Jimmy sounded really elated, I suppose he felt it was as much his big day as it was ours. His high spirits didn't help my guilt any, but I did my best to act normally.

'Have you seen the *Evening News?'*

'No, none of us have been out yet.'

'They've done a special edition for the park show. There's a huge picture of you on the front page.'

'Yeah, that's great. Have you been to the park yet?'

'Yes. The cats down there think we should pull something like a hundred and fifty thousand.'

'That's a hell of a lot of people.'

'If you don't fuck up, you'll have England sewn up.'

'We won't fuck up.'

'Okay then.'

'Listen Jimmy. What's happening about our getting down there?'

'Eddie's going to pick Mac and Steve up, and then come round for you. He ought to show up around two-thirty. Okay?'

'Fine. Can you make sure Eddie's got plenty of booze and stuff?'

'Sure. Is that all, no other problems?'

'I don't think so.'

'Okay, see you later.'

'Yeah, later.'

I hung up, and told the others what was happening, then disappeared into the bathroom for a wash and shave.

Eddie turned up dead on time, and we saw that Jimmy had rented a Rolls for the occasion. Jerry could put down Jimmy all he liked but there was no denying that he had a sense of class.

We drove down Oxford Street, passing round a bottle of champagne and feeling like Regency bucks. We swung round Marble Arch and couldn't believe the scene. It was as though every freak in the world had made a pilgrimage there.

I had a moment of intense panic.

'Hey Eddie, we haven't got to walk through that lot, have we?'

Eddie shook his head.

'I got a pass that lets us drive back stage. It's all worked out.'

'Thank Christ for that.'

We turned into the Speakers' Corner entrance and a cop flagged us down.

'You can't drive through here.' Jerry wound down the window. 'We're the band, baby.'

'I don't care who you are, you can't take the car past this point.'

Jerry stuck his head out of the window.

'Listen you...'

Before trouble could start Eddie produced his pass and the cop sullenly waved us through. We drove across the grass towards the stage, but about halfway, an immovable knot of kids forced us to stop. They turned and, seeing the Rolls with a crowd of longhairs inside it, pressed forward to have a closer look. We were completely surrounded, and although Eddie tried hooting and revving the engine, the kids just kept pressing closer and closer. Eddie tried winding down the window, but when this mass of hands began to burst through, he shut it again. All at once I began to get frightened. We were trapped in the middle of this huge crowd and totally at their mercy. Jerry must have caught the same flash because he urgently leaned towards Eddie.

'How the fuck do we get out of this?'

Eddie shook his head.

'Fuck knows, if I try and drive forward we'll probably kill someone.'

'If they keep pressing forward, they'll cave the fucking windows in.

'Where are those fucking pigs, they ought to get us out of this.'

'They ain't going to make much effort to get us out.'

There was an edge of panic in the car. It was surreal and frightening, the hundreds of faces peering in the windows while we sat there, unable to do anything, like helpless specimens in a bizarre museum.

'How the fuck do we get out of here?'

Just as we were all about to let go and become hysterical there was a ripple in the crowd, some of the faces looking in the windscreen turned, were jerked away altogether, and relief arrived in the form of a flying wedge of bikers.

A big oil-stained brute in a chrome Nazi helmet hammered on the window;

'Just drive ahead, me and the lads'll keep these fucking hippies out of the way.'

Chas put the car into gear, and surrounded by the crew of Angels we slowly moved forward. If the crowd didn't get out of the way fast enough, the Angels shoved them aside, and finally, in this rough and ready way, we made it to the safety of the backstage enclosure. Jimmy was waiting for us as though nothing had happened.

'You boys are pretty late, you're due to go on in twenty minutes.'

Jerry bristled.

'Late? Don't talk to us about late, man. We were almost fucking killed by the fucking crowd. There were no fucking arrangements to get us through safely. The fucking pigs just let us drive right into the fucking crowd and get mobbed.'

Jimmy looked concerned.

'I'll talk to the guys running the security and find out...'

'Fuck the guys running the security, how come you didn't set something up? We should have been met at the entrance to the park and escorted in. How come you didn't fix that?'

‘It didn’t occur to me you’d get mobbed. I rented the car so you’d show up with a bit of class, and that seemed to be enough.’

‘It fucking ought to have occurred to you. You’re our fucking manager.’

Jimmy shrugged.

‘Getting mobbed is always good publicity.’

‘And fuck what happens to us? Well, fuck you man!’

Jerry swung round and marched off towards the caravan that served as a dressing room, and the rest of us followed him. The Hell’s Angels fell in beside us, they seemed to have appointed themselves our personal guards, and Jimmy was left standing on his own.

We flopped down on the benches in the caravan. The Angels had surrounded the door and were keeping everyone out. The place had, however, become quite crowded. Chas and Ruth were already there getting into some hard drinking. Terry Venables was rushing around being charming to us and laughing at everyone’s jokes. Three chicks had blagued their way in, claiming that we’d invited them, although none of us could remember having seen them before.

Despite the efforts of the Angels, more and more parasites began to fill up the trailer, and with about ten minutes to go before we were due to go on, I decided to grab Chas.

‘Can you throw all these people out of here so we can get ourselves together? All except family.’

He nodded.

‘Sure.’

A quick line in abuse and some shoving, and the trailer was quickly cleared of everyone except our own people, and we had a few minutes to be ourselves before we went out into the circus again. The guitars were brought out and put in tune, we passed round a quick joint and a snort of coke, and then Jimmy appeared in the doorway.

‘Can you come up on stage as soon as you’re ready?’

He glanced at Jerry.

‘There’s a crew of these rockers to take you through to the stage.’

Jerry looked up with a sneer.

‘They ain’t rockers, they’re Britain’s Hell’s Angels.’

We stepped out of the caravan and found that the Angels had formed an aisle right to the steps to the stage. It was a weird sight, these twin lines of filthy dudes in their oily denims and Nazi regalia holding back the crowd of groovers. It seemed oddly appropriate.

There was a delay as a scuffle started around a middle-aged photographer who tried to push his way through to us. He was quickly stopped by a length of chain, and his look of astonishment as he staggered back was so funny. He’d come along to get the readers of some Sunday paper kicks from these sub-humans, and just couldn’t believe that anything they did could affect him. A lifetime of arrogance and bluster had left him totally unprepared for anyone who didn’t give a fuck about his bullshit trips.

Then we were on the stage, swaggering from the back like lords of creation. At least, that’s how it started, for a first sight of that crowd stopped us dead. It went on for ever, like the whole population of the planet was sitting out there, looking at us. For an instant my legs went weak.

Jerry was the first to recover. He stepped up to the mike and quickly glanced back at Chas.

‘Are the mikes on?’

Chas nodded, and Jerry turned back to the audience. He stared at them in silence for about ten seconds, and a kind of tension began to happen with the front rows. Then, just like that, he broke it.

‘Afternoon.’

There was a ripple of laughter.

‘Sure are a lot of you fuckers.’

He stepped back, nodded, and we launched into *Friday Night.*

The applause when we finished was unreal, quite different to the sound of applause inside a building. So many people clapping and cheering created a huge rumble that produced strange snap echoes from trees and nearby buildings. It was a frightening and exhilarating thing to have directed at you, to experience the power that lay in having that much energy at your disposal.

‘Thank you, you’re too fucking much. So many of you. This must be the biggest fucking tribe in the world.’

Jerry stepped up to his mike.

‘Forget what the fat cats tell you, this is the high society.’

There was a roar from the front rows who’d caught it.

‘THIS IS THE HIGH SOCIETY.’

The roar spread as the ones further back got the shout. Jerry swung round and faced the rest of us.

‘Can’t Stay Here.’

We were off again. A couple of chicks tried to climb the front of the scaffolding stage but were hauled off by the bikers. They were comparatively gentle with freaks, but really took their nasties out on the straight pressmen who tried to muscle on to the stage.

As we finished the third song, some of the crowd were on their feet and others were still sitting. It was time to start them moving. If we could move a crowd as big as this we could move anything.

‘Just because we’re all out here in the sunshine don’t mean that you don’t have to dance. How about we all shake our arses? Come on now! Let’s shake it! We’re going to play a rock and roll song right now. A song that’s been around almost as long as we have. Want to play it for these dudes that have been looking after us today.’

I pointed at the crowd of bikers. It was good having them on our side, I hoped they would never turn against us. We started Chuck Berry’s *Maybelline.* It was a little goody we’d cooked up for the concert. The Angels hooked their thumbs in their belts and went into their shoulder jerking tribal stomp routine. The crowd gradually got up, it was an amazing sight, like one of those speeded-up films of grass growing. It was fantastic, we had them on their feet. Thousands and thousands of heads bobbing in unison. We threw ourselves into it. The feeling was like a jolt of electricity.

After *Maybelline* I grabbed a beer from behind the drums. Before I could go back to the front, Venables caught my arm.

‘The cops are causing trouble.’

‘What?’

‘They say you’ve got to hold down your language.’

I nearly fell over.

‘My language?’

‘They say they can’t tolerate your swearing.’

‘What?’

‘They say they’ll pull the plugs if you don’t cool it.’

‘They’re kidding.’

‘There’s a superintendent or something. He looks like he means it.’

‘Tell him to come up and tell everyone. We’ll give him a mike.’

‘Listen, don’t cause any trouble.’

‘Won’t dream of it.’

I crossed the stage and grabbed my mike. I’d show this fucking cop who was running this show.

‘Listen! I want everyone to hear this, right? There’s this COP...’

The word ‘cop’ reverberated like an outlaw’s first pistol shot.

‘…this cop...’

It sounded good and I did it again.

‘…He says he don’t like our language. Says if we don’t stop saying fuck and things like that he’s going to stop the show.’

There was a roar from the crowd, and I glanced behind me. There was a team of cops coming up the steps to the stage, led by one in a flat hat and silver braid. I swung back to the crowd.

‘It seems to me that we’re all here, minding our own business, having a peaceful rock and roll party. We’re going to keep it peaceful. Right?

The crowd roared back.

‘There’s just one thing this cop should know. I f he wants to FUCK UP OUR PARTY – there’s enough of us to TAKE HIS FUCKING CITY APART!’

There was a deafening roar, and a wave of clenched fists rose from the crowd. Then the cheers turned to boos, and I looked round. Beside me was this chief cop flanked by a couple of minions. Terry Venables was hovering about trying to be diplomatic. The cop took hold of my arm and tried to pull me away from the mike.

‘Come over here, son.’

I shook myself free.

‘Take your fucking hands off me, pig.’

‘Listen sunshine, if you want to take that attitude I can stop this show any time I like.’

I laughed in his face.

‘Yeah? You really believe that?’

I pointed at the crowd.

‘What do you think they’ll do? You want a hundred thousand of them to trash Park Lane? You know what’ll happen to the Dorchester and the Hilton? You want that to happen? I’ll guarantee it will.’

He opened his mouth to speak, and then the realization hit him. Sure, he could push hippies around, but not in batches of a hundred thousand. He was lost. He hated us, he hated to back down, but he also couldn’t go on without a riot. The slow handclap reminded him that time was running out. I was unable to resist a last shot.

‘If there’s a riot, pig remember it was you who started it.’

In the pause that followed, Venables took the opportunity to get the cop’s attention. He began to rap furiously and slowly lead him back to the step. I turned back to the crowd.

‘Okay! That’s sorted out, let’s get on with the party.’

Jimmy and Venables had hired one of the park restaurants for a party after the show. I think if we’d known that they’d also invited the press we wouldn’t have gone.

Directly we stepped through the door they besieged us. It wasn’t the regular ones, the music papers and the undergrounds. It was the Sundays. They’d been attracted by the incident with the police and they were after blood.

‘Was that a stunt?’

‘What?’

‘Did you hire the police?’

‘They came free with four gallons.’

‘Isn’t the psychedelic music a fake?’

‘Huh?’

‘Surely you’re just trying to be professional rebels?’

‘We were, but we got fired.’

‘How do you get your hair like that?’
‘Grow it so it’s all on the outside.’
‘What would have happened if the police had stopped this concert?’
‘They would have had a pleasant funny surprise.’
‘You mean you would have started a riot if they’d stopped the show?’ –
‘The police would have started a riot if they’d stopped the show.’
‘Are you anarchists?’
‘Perish the thought.’
‘Does you mother approve of what you’re doing?’
‘She likes the way I walk.’
‘What are you all rebelling against?’
‘What have you got?’
‘If you did tear down this society, what would you replace it with?’
‘We’re the demolition crew, not the architects.’
‘Are you on drugs?’
‘Sure, we drink petrol and sniff eggs.’
‘What has influenced your music?’
‘Beatrix Potter, the Marquis de Sade and some guys named Joe.’
‘What about the Beatles?’
‘They’re very busy.’
‘Bob Dylan?’
‘Him too.’
‘Theatre of cruelty?’
‘There ought to be a law against it.’
‘Boys, could you all look this way for one more shot?’

We looked, we mugged, we answered the idiot questions with smart remarks, and after a while they began to drift away. A guy from one of the liberal papers, I think it was the *Observer,* hung round to ask us a few, more sensible, questions and convince us that he was really on our side all along, but he turned out to have missed the point just as much as any of the others. He was at least polite, though, and we tried to be a little more helpful.

From the restaurant, we split back to the pad, but had only been there a few minutes when Chas called up and said there was a party being given on our behalf by some people in Chelsea, and we were off again.

It was one of those polite sort of numbers in a King’s Road pad full of pop art and antiques with little bunches of people standing round rapping earnestly at each other. There was, however, enough good booze and dope to keep us from running away, although it did prove to be the kind of place where you had to keep moving, otherwise some trendy parasite would back you into a corner and start telling you at length about his idiot ideas.

The trouble is that you can’t actually keep moving for ever, and eventually the whole band wound up holding court in the kitchen, all sitting round this huge glass table, using each other for mutual protection.

We were by then very ripped, but it was the first time we’d all sat down together since the concert, and weird flashes began to come out.

‘Did you know they used to hang people right by where we were playing?’

We all looked at Connie.

‘You mean Tyburn?’

He nodded.

‘Yeah, that’s right. It was about a hundred yards from the stage.’

‘Jesus, I didn’t know that.’

‘It’s weird actually. It must have been a parallel kind of scene.’

‘That’s right. When there was a hanging, these giant crowds used to turn out.’

‘Apparently some highwaymen had fans. When they were getting hanged, all these chicks would show up. They’d make a speech from the gallows, and some dudes even did a song before they got snuffed. The gentry even bought seats in special stands.’

‘I guess that concert was much the same thing as a public hanging.’

It was one of Steve’s rare flat remarks. We all looked at him.

‘How do you mean?’

‘Well, you know. All these people, they’ve just shown up to see someone put through. They want to look at an individual going through what for them is a unique experience, dig?’

‘How long have you been working on that one?’

‘Ever since we came off. That stage struck me kind of like a gallows.’

‘Morbid little fucker, isn’t he?’

‘He’s right actually, we are kind of like old-time outlaws, only we play guitars instead of getting hanged.’

‘According to William Burroughs, the guy getting hung experiences a sexual orgasm as his neck breaks.’

‘According to William Burroughs the CIA runs the world.’

‘So doesn’t it?’

‘I really can’t understand all those people turning out to see us. I mean, I feel very ordinary.’

‘Everyone feels ordinary inside their own head.’

‘Hear the socially conscious musicians produce philosophical clichés.’

‘I glanced round the room at the figures beyond the glow of the Tiffany lamp, who were standing around listening.

‘Listen, we’re becoming a sideshow, I’m going to take a look around.’

Mac looked up and grinned.

‘See if there’s anything worth ripping off. If the party’s no good, I always like to teal something.’

I stood up and ambled out of the kitchen. The hallway was empty and I stood there for a minute tying to reorientate myself and wondering if I felt sick. A door opened behind me.

‘Well look here, it’s the hot-shot rock and roller.’

I turned round all ready to defend myself against some loser trying to score points by insulting me, and there was the most beautiful spade chick I’d ever seen. Or, at least, the most beautiful one I’d ever found alone in a hallway.

‘You look like you thought you were pretty hot stuff strutting round that stage today.’

Beautiful she might be, but it also looked as though she was moving up to gouge me. I verbally tried to sidestep.

‘I am.’

‘You think so?’

‘All these people give me money for it.’

‘They also give money to pimps.’

‘They also give money to whores.’

‘At least whores give value for money.’

‘We give value for money.’

‘Oh sure, ripping off black people’s music and serving it up to a bunch of honkey kids.’

I began to get annoyed.

‘Don’t give me that crap about black man’s music, babe. I’ve been listening to music and playing music since I was a kid, and nobody told me nothing about how I shouldn’t dig James Brown or Otis Redding or Robert Johnson because that was black folks’ music. I don’t

even want to hear that bullshit. Understand? And anyway, what do you do that makes you think I'm some kind of target?'

She laughed, flashing white carnivorous teeth. At second glance, she was really something. Day-glo green metallic dress, matching boots, and the final absurd touch of a blond wig. She posed with one hand on her hip.

'I just like to find out how full of shit people are.'

'And how do I rate?'

'Heavy on the plus side.'

'Is that so? That's what you really think?'

'Sure.'

She was still laughing at me. It was getting out of hand, and I had to regain some ground.

'Why?'

The last hope question.

'Why are you full of shit?'

'That's right, you can't go around making remarks like that without being prepared to justify them.'

'Justify them, shit man. Just look at yourself. The big tough freak, with the fancy clothes and the makeup and the shades and the nigger to drive his limousine, and all these little chickies jumping through hoops when you tell them, legs up the wall. I guess you're pretty pleased with yourself.'

'I don't have too many complaints.'

'I bet you don't. You're so together with giving it out, laying it down. You think you could change places and take it?'

'Yeah sure, anything for trips.'

She parodied my accent.

'Oh, sure, anything for trips man. I'd make bets you'd never go through with it.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah sure man, you've beaten up on little chickies, kinky whipping scenes and that. Right?'

'Right.'

'But if some chickie, one of your little groupies, began climbing on top of you and beating up on your precious body you'd pretty soon start yelling enough. Am I right?'

'I don't think so.'

'You don't think so, You wouldn't care to put it to a test?'

'How?'

'You come back to my place, honey, and just do exactly what I tell you, you just do what I want for a few hours.'

I hesitated. Either this chick had a neat double negative approach to pulling celebrities, or she had a real thing about insulting white guys. Either way, it seemed like it might be a new experience. Slowly I nodded.

'I could go along with it.'

'Okay, so let's split.'

'Right now?'

'That's what I said.'

'I ought to tell the others I'm going.'

'They can make out all right without you. I said for you to split.'

That was the way it was going to be. I shrugged.

'I'll get my coat.'

'Get mine while you're there.'

We took a cab to her place. It was a large, sparsely furnished flatlet with a stereo, a coffee table, a couple of wicker chairs and a large double bed with a fur cover, and cushions in bright Afro-looking material. The walls were white with a couple of Black Panther posters and some large blow-ups of her modelling. At one end there was a kind of alcove which contained a kitchen and shower.

Directly we were inside, she turned on an angle-poise lamp beside the bed, slipped out of her coat and sat down.

'Make some coffee.'

I realized that this obedience trip wasn't all fun, but I seemed to be in a position where I had to go along with it, so I headed for the alcove and started looking for the kettle.

'I don't know your name.'

She lay back on the bed and made herself comfortable.

'It doesn't matter, I already know yours.'

I turned on the electric kettle, and sat down in one of the chairs. She raised her head.

'What do you think you're doing?'

'Waiting for the kettle to boil.'

'So don't just sit there, come over here.'

I stood up and walked over to the bed. She looked me up and down appraisingly.

'Okay, so strip your clothes off.'

I hesitated.

'Just like that?'

'If you don't like it, you can always split.'

I began to unbutton my shirt and she grinned.

'You're getting the idea, no smart comebacks, just do what you're told.'

I took my shirt off and let it drop on the floor. As I started to unzip my boots she shook her head.

'You ain't too sexy about it. Anyone who prances about on a stage the way you do ought to be able to take their clothes off in a way that does something for anyone watching.'

I immediately became all thumbs, it seemed almost impossible to undress in front of this girl and keep it all together. Her critical gaze threw me completely.

When I was finally naked she sat up and put a hand between my legs, cupping my balls.

'You ain't too badly hung for a white boy.'

I looked down at her.

'You're not going to drag out that old myth?'

Quickly and viciously she twisted, and it hurt.

'Remember what I said. No smart comebacks. Either take it all or split. Anyway, the kettle's boiling, so you can go and make the coffee.'

She released me, and I trotted obediently off to the kitchenette. As I took the Nescafé out of the cupboard her voice came from the bed.

'If you're worried about splashing boiling water on yourself. there's an apron hanging on the fridge.'

The apron was just too much. Parading round naked, okay, but that was as far as I was prepared to go, no aprons. I suppose I was lucky that she didn't have a bunny suit handy, or I would have found myself laced into that. I finished making the coffee, and carried the two cups over to the bed. I handed one to her, and then sat down on the rug with the other one.

I was totally ignored while she languidly drank her coffee. It was a weird sensation, sitting there naked and vulnerable, a useless object, waiting to be picked up and played with. I could almost feel my free will slipping away.

Eventually she put down her cup and uncoiled from the bed.

'I'm going to undress now, you can watch me if you want to.'

‘Thank you.’

She smiled.

‘Now you’re getting into it.’

She really knew how to use her body, and by the time she was half out of the green lurex, I had the makings of an erection. She paused and grinned at me.

‘Now you got no secrets to conceal.’

She cupped one of her breasts.

‘That’s right honey, you’re visible.’

When she removed all her clothes, she posed in front of me, very black and very naked. I reached out a hand to touch her, but she slapped it away.

‘Just bide your time, honey, I’ll tell you what to do.’

She sat down on the edge of the bed, and opened her legs.

‘There. You just crawl over here and give me some of that head you’re always pretending to give that microphone.’

I did as I was told for what seemed like an age, listening to her breathing becoming more and more urgent. It felt as though it was time to up the pace and I began to move my lips up her belly. Before I’d got very far, she took hold of my ears, and firmly pushed my face back between her legs.

‘I’ll tell you when I want something different.’

The only sop to my ego was that her voice was no longer quite so firm and even.

Finally she gave a shudder and pushed me away. For a while, she lay back on the bed.

Then slowly she sat up. There was a wicked expression on her face.

‘I think I’m going to beat you, boy.’

There seemed to be nothing I could do except nod silently.

She stood up and opened a drawer.

‘Think you’ll enjoy being beaten?’

I looked up at her.

‘I don’t know.’

She laughed.

‘You can always get dressed and leave.’

I stayed where I was, in for a penny in for a pound. She took a leather strap out of the drawer.

‘Okay then, kneel down so your body’s on the bed.’

I arranged myself as I was told, and waited. It was like time had stopped as I knelt there, totally vulnerable, waiting for whatever would happen.

Then it came, a sear of pain across the small of my back. I gasped, it hurt like hell, but the excitement of the situation carried me along. From behind me, I heard her count.

‘One!’

The strap came down again, this time across my buttocks.

‘Two!’

Again. I wondered how much I could in fact stand.

‘Three!’

‘Four!’

‘Five!’

I gritted my teeth and dug my fingers into the fur of the bedcover.

‘Six!’

‘Seven!’

‘Eight!’

My buttocks felt like they were on fire, and each time the strap came down the pain increased, even though a moment before I thought that it couldn’t get any worse.

‘Ten!’
‘Eleven!’
I cried out, I couldn’t stay quiet any longer.
‘Twelve, I’m going to go on until you beg me to stop.’
‘Thirteen.’
I twisted my head round.
‘Okay, I’ve had enough!’
She hit me again.
‘I said beg.’
‘Please... please stop.’
‘Fifteen ... I said beg.’
‘Please. I beg you, stop!’
She laughed and dropped the strap.
‘Okay, get up.’
I scrambled to my feet, and she put a hand on my prick.
‘Guess you’d like to fuck me now.’
I put an arm round her and caught my breath.
‘Yes ... yes I would.’
She pushed me away.
‘Tough, I’m not quite ready yet.’
‘Oh come on, please.’
‘That’s what I like to hear. Lie on the bed.’
I lay down on my back and with leisurely movements she straddled me, played with me, and finally moved me inside her. Slowly she began to rock backwards and forwards with her eyes shut. Gradually the pace quickened, faster and more urgent. I thrust myself up at her. It got wilder, I lost myself and then with a final thrust I was finished. I relaxed back into the bed, but then, as from a great distance, I heard her voice.
‘Keep going honey, just because you’ve finished, it don’t mean I have.’
I finally slipped away from her pad after four or five hours’ sleep, and got back home around lunchtime. I found everyone camped on Connie’s bed going through the Sunday papers. From their conversation as I walked in, it seemed that we’d attracted a certain amount of attention.
‘Hey Lou, you seen the *News of the World?’*
I shook my head.
‘I ain’t seen nothing this morning.’
‘They reckon that pop music has gone far enough.’
‘Who? Us?’
‘We symbolize a dangerous disrespect for law and order.’
‘Is that what they say?’
‘Plus a whole lot more.’
‘Yeah? What?’
‘They rabbit it on about Paul McCartney and acid, and the Stones flouting the normal conventions of decent people.’
‘What about the other papers?’
‘The *Sunday Mirror’s* worried about our dangerous courtship with the Hell’s Angels, and the *People* thinks it’s about time that somebody took steps to curb the menace of these drug sodden hippie leaders, and the way they use primitive rock music for overtly political ends.’
‘Perish the thought.’
‘The whole piece starts off: “Yesterday, in a London park, a hundred thousand people were treated to the unpleasant sight of a senior police officer being threatened and humiliated by a

long haired pop group while their hippie and Hell's Angel fans clapped and chanted. Violence had already flared when a reporter from this paper was assaulted by chain-wielding motorcyclists… And so it goes on.'

I broke up laughing.

'Too fucking much, are there any pictures?'

'Sure, there's a big picture of you and Jerry looking like a couple of junkie faggots abusing that pig, and there's a shot of some chick in the audience with her tits hanging out.'

'There just had to be, let's have a look.'

He passed over the paper, and there it was, just like he'd described it, Jerry and I, eyes half closed, looking stoned and vicious haranguing this clean, clean pig, with the little roll of flesh just about to pop over the back of his collar. I noticed that we'd made it to page three.

'It really looks like we're about to become the number one bad guys.'

'Jimmy called about half an hour ago. He was like a dog with two tails.'

Jerry scowled.

'He's going to get one of his fucking tails lopped off pretty damn soon.'

I put down the paper.

'What actually are we going to do about that?'

'Listen, we've got to blow him out. That scene in the park was a joke, we could have really got hurt when the crowd surrounded the car. The bigger we get, the less Jimmy seems able to handle things.'

Connie joined in.

'Jerry's right. I wasn't that worried about the bread, but we do seem to have reached a point where Jimmy just doesn't make it. My vote says we should wire Gutman straight away. Let him sort the whole thing out.'

I nodded.

'It does seem the only thing to do, and it might as well be sooner than later.'

Jerry jumped up.

'Okay, let's send a cable.'

Connie waved him down.

'Hang on man, we better get Mac and Steve in on this.'

'Okay then. Let's call them up and settle it once and for all. They're thinking the same way we are.'

Connie went out to call Mac and Steve, while Jerry, Ruth and I went back to looking at the papers. With the hysterical fuss they seemed to be making over the incident in the park, I wondered whether we might just get busted again.

It took about an hour for Steve and Mac to show up, and when they did, we went through the whole routine again of how and why we should get rid of Jimmy. Steve remained silent through most of the discussion until, right at the end, he suddenly looked up.

'I think we should cable Gutman straight away.'

That seemed to set the seal on it. Steve had spoken, it was agreed. Ruth went off to look for the number of international cables.

The telegram was short and to the point.

> CURRENT MANAGEMENT NO LONGER SATISFACTORY — APPRECIATE HELP AND
> ADVICE SOONEST — WILLY'S RATS.

It looked as though the deed was done, the machine to off Jimmy had been set in motion.

Although it might seem hard to believe, we almost forgot about the situation with Jimmy

and Gutman over the next few days. The park concert and the resulting press seemed to have sparked off a whole chain reaction. In Monday's mail there were thirty-six fan letters and seven threats, and Jerry and I were persuaded to go on some late night highbrow chat show, where they got us so pissed that when we got in front of the cameras we were unable to do anything except be jive and uncooperative.

The interviewer seemed to have us tagged as Marxists, and although we took pains to explain that as far as we were concerned, Groucho was as important as Karl, he kept throwing political questions at us that we could only counter with surrealism.

The morning after the show a whole lot of people rang up and bitched about how come we couldn't explain the freak philosophy in rational terms, and we did our best to point out that if we were able to do that, we probably wouldn't be musicians. It didn't seem to get through, and by lunchtime, we'd given up answering the phone.

We should have stopped answering the door as well, because in the middle of the afternoon a whole mess of political weirdos in their Che Guevara coats and Chairman Mao badges trooped into the pad, and sat around for hours, scratching, smoking our dope, and rapping on us about how we should get down with the people. At one point, Jerry became super-enthusiastic and began promising them all kinds of deals that would free practically everyone in sight and finance the revolution for years to come. The fact that we didn't have a hope of doing a hundredth of what he'd promised didn't seem to deter him, and the revolutionaries left full of crazy plans.

The rest of us grabbed him afterwards and demanded how come he'd promised so much on our behalf. He just shrugged.

'People only really come round here looking for fantasies. I give them what they want.'

On Wednesday there were the music papers with rather kinder reports of the concert that actually talked about how we played, and then, at about four in the afternoon, the phone rang. Connie and Jerry were all for not answering, but I've never been able to resist a ringing phone and I picked it up.

'Hello.'

'Hold the line, I have a call from the United States for you.'

There was a series of clicks, and a distinguished male voice came on the line.

'To whom am I speaking?'

'Uh... Lou Francis.'

'Ah, good. This is Sydney Gutman. I received your cable.'

'You did? Great.'

'I take it you want me to sort out your business affairs for you?'

'Yes, that's the general idea.'

'Does DiAngelo know that you've been in touch with me?'

'No, we thought it would be better to say nothing.'

'Good. That will make matters a great deal easier. Listen, I'll be arriving in London at the weekend. I suggest that you don't say anything to DiAngelo until I get there. Do you understand?'

'Yes sure, nobody's busting a gut to rush round and tell him he's fired.'

Gutman chuckled.

'I can imagine. Anyway, don't do anything, and I'll sort out the whole thing when I get there. Okay?'

'Okay, fine.'

'I'll see you in a few days then?'

'Right.'

'Goodbye.'

'Bye.'

I put the phone down. It was hard to believe it was really happening, that I'd actually been talking to the legendary Sydney Gutman, and that he was coming to London to sort out our affairs. I turned to Jerry and Connie.

'That was Gutman.'

'Really? What did he say?'

'He's coming to London on the weekend, and he's going to sort out Jimmy.'

'Yeah, he's really going to do it?'

'That's what he said.'

'That's fantastic.'

'He said for us to keep quiet about it until he gets here.'

Connie grinned.

'I'm not going to say anything, I don't want Jimmy coming round here to kill us.'

'You think he's going to get really mad?' Connie nodded.

'Yes.'

'We'd better watch what we say in front of Eddie and Chas. I'm pretty sure Chas will stay with us, but Eddie's worked for Jimmy for a long time, and I don't know which way he'll swing.'

'That's true. I'll warn Mac and Steve that the whole thing must be kept strictly between ourselves.'

The next few days were understandably tense, the quiet before a storm, the proportion of which we were quite unable to predict. There had always been Jimmy's dark hints about how 'no musician ever walked away from him', but how this kind of Mafia bravado would stand up in the face of Sydney Gutman's icy efficiency remained to be seen. All we could hope was that Jimmy wouldn't turn vicious.

Gutman called us from his hotel on Saturday afternoon and told us that he had a meeting with Jimmy on Monday, after which he'd come and see us. He hoped that by then everything would be sorted out.

Sunday was tense and awkward, particularly when Eddie dropped in unexpectedly to get stoned with us, and we all had to sit around feeling shifty and avoiding his eyes. Monday was even worse, it was like walking on eggs as we all hung around the pad waiting for the explosion to come. The phone finally rang just after five. It was Jimmy, and his voice was a cold angry hiss.

'I have a Mr Gutman with me, and I suggest you all come over here straight away.'

He hung up without waiting for a reply, leaving Connie clutching the dead phone. For the first time we were really frightened.

'He didn't sound as though he was about to laugh it off.'

'Think we should go?'

'He said Gutman was there.'

'We've got to, really.' -

'It rather smacks of walking into the lion's den.'

'He sounded more like a cobra than a lion.'

'Let's ring Mac and Steve, see what they think.'

Mac and Steve had had an identical phone call, and were going through the same changes as the rest of us. We agreed to meet in a pub just down the road from Jimmy's, have a couple of drinks and then go up there together.

As we walked into the reception, Pat nodded towards Jimmy's office without saying anything. It looked bad.

Jimmy was sitting in a corner with his hands clasped in front of him, staring at his fingers, it was a pose we'd never seen before. Al Capone sitting calm and deadly. Gutman was a

complete contrast. He leaned back in one of the smaller chairs, staring at the ceiling as th6ugh mildly embarrassed by the way Jimmy was behaving.

Jimmy looked up as we walked in.

'You've been busy little boys, haven't you?'

There was an awkward silence while nobody said anything, and Jimmy regarded us poisonously.

'You've really had a go at carving me up.'

Jerry moved to the front of the group.

'It wasn't that we wanted to carve you up.'

'What else was it, then?'

'We just wanted out.'

'So what's that but turning me over? You used my money to get where you are, and when the whole thing starts to get off the ground, you suddenly decide that you want out.'

Jerry looked defensive.

We don't want to turn you over, we're just not happy with the way things are going.'

Jimmy's face darkened.

'What the fuck do you mean not happy, you're about to make a fucking fortune, for a group who didn't have a po to piss in when you came to me. I made you bastards, and don't think I can't break you just as easily.'

Gutman slowly turned his head towards Jimmy.

'Do you feel that these kind of threats are really necessary, Mr DiAngelo?'

'Don't give me the that formal shit, Gutman, you and these little bastards are trying to rip me off, and I'm not going to stand for it.'

Jimmy snapped to his feet and advanced on Gutman.

'You are in a lot of trouble, my friend. I've got a lot contacts that you would do well to think about before you try and fuck with me. You know what I mean?'

Gutman's expression hardly changed.

'Please don't threaten me with your criminal connections. It might frighten small time promoters, but if you ever tried those kind of tactics with either myself or my clients, you would be in a great deal of trouble.'

'What the fuck do you mean, clients?'

Gutman gestured patiently in our direction.

'These gentlemen became my clients the moment they asked me to dissolve their ties with your organization.'

'You'll find that those ties are very hard to break.'

'Really, Mr DiAngelo, I think you'll find that your relationship with the band will prove very tenuous.'

Jimmy clenched his fists.

'You are getting closer and closer to a whole lot of trouble.'

Gutman smiled faintly.

'What are you going to do? Beat me up**,** put out a contract on me? Come now.'

His face hardened.

'It's really time that you woke up to the reality of your situation. You have things pretty much your own way here in London, but London is a backwater. You are small time, Di'Angelo. You are never going to be allowed to harm my interests. I am much too valuable, far more valuable than you are.'

Jimmy fell silent. Gutman sat up briskly.

'Has that sunk in? Your band has just got to be too big for you, that's all. They now need the skills that I can offer. You'll be compensated quite well for the work you've done, but you really have no choice in the matter.'

‘You don’t think so? Maybe I’ve got more pull than you think, maybe you’re not so big as you imagine.’

Gutman sat back in his chair.

‘Stop pretending, you know what the situation is, if you stop and think about it. If you’ve got to make a fight of it to preserve your honour you just: lose. Being Italian doesn’t count for very much these days.’

There was a long silence, and then Jimmy suddenly deflated.

‘Okay. If I let them go, what do I get out of it?’

Gutman slowly sat up. It seemed that he was savouring Jimmy’s collapse. He opened his attache case and produced some papers.

‘I think you’ll find our terms more than reasonable The band will give your record company one more album, and allow you to...’

‘Hold on, I don’t own the entire company. There’s a...’

‘Don’t bullshit me!’

Gutman looked annoyed.

‘Any investigation immediately shows that you own nearly all of it. The structure’s good enough to fool musicians but it doesn’t deceive me. As I said, you can have one more album and re-release right on all the material you already have. On top of that, we’ll give you a two per cent override on any management contracts.’

‘Is that it?’

‘You don’t think it’s enough?’

‘One album and two per cent? I don’t see why I should give you the whole fucking band for that.’

Gutman slowly shook his head.

‘I really wish you’d stop trying to save face, you’ve lost the band, and that’s it. You’ve done very well out of them considering all the money you’ve managed to take them for. I don’t foresee bargaining with you.’

Jimmy sat down with a sigh.

‘Okay, okay. It’ll have to do. Just remember that you might not always have the edge on me.’

Gutman smiled.

‘I’ll worry about that when the time comes.’

‘ALL RIGHT! OKAY! You’re all GETTING OFF now! RIGHT? That’s right, lets HEAR you! COME ON NOW! Okay, GOING DOWN NOW! Going ALL THE WAY DOWN! Last time! Last time! LAST TIME!’

And smash right into it, the last number, the culmination of the whole ceremony, the rush, the great final build up, and then we run away, out of the theatre, away from this, jerk out their connection until the next time.

It’s moving really fast and the impressions come in disjointed flashes. I’m tired but a second rush is coming on. My mouth is dry and tacky. A bead of sweat falls off the end of my nose, and the barrel of the mike is slippery in my hand, but it doesn’t matter. All the input becomes less relevant because it’s me and the band, and that’s it. Just giving out, pushing these people as far over the top as we can force them to go. Pushing them, hating them~ loving them, doing our best to push them out of their minds, and stampede them into a self destroying rush. There is something reckless and suicidal about the end of a rock and roll show.

Killer at the wheel
Radio up load

Throw it in their faces, the hundreds of them milling at the front of the stage. Step across the footlights and dance on the narrow strip between the lights and the drop to the audience. I dare them to reach out and touch me, and white arms with stretching fingers appear, but before they can reach me, I skip back.

An eagle hits the temple
And lightning rips the cloud

They mustn’t ever touch you, or that will destroy the magic, earth the power. I swing round and throw out my arm, taunting them.

What does it feel like
Behind a dead man’s eyes

Bent forward, laying it on, ramming down their throats.

Tell me how it feels honey
Is it a surprise

They eat it up. whatever you put on them, they eat it up.

Somethin' gettin' born honey
Running out of hand
Somethin' gettin' born honey
Something
That you don’t understand

Jerk back like I’m hit by the guitar sound. leap and jerk.

Nothing matters at all. It’s me, me, and I’m winning.

Life didn't seem appreciably different with Gutman as our manager. The way they talked about us as though we were a brand of canned peas shook us up rather, but after the final meeting with Jimmy, things seemed to settle down very much as they were before. We attracted more attention and got a bit more press, but this could have just been a natural outcome of the park concert.

We did a tour of British concert halls, and then the same thing in Holland and Germany. When all that was over, we prepared to go back to America.

It was back in the States we began to notice how Gutman was changing things. We went to America as a big, big band. The last job was being done on us. We were hot. We had two albums in the Cash Box chart, and they wanted us.

With Gutman putting it together and the extra money, it was a very different tour. Everything seemed to be a step up. We stayed in better hotels, we had suites instead of collections of rooms, and the party seemed to come to us, instead of us going out and looking for it.

The halls we played this time were the really big ones. Huge aircraft hangar structures, or baseball stadia with colossal scaffolding stages. It seemed all so huge and menacing that the band drew together allowing nobody, with the possible exception of Chas, Gutman and some of the road crew, to get at all close to us. Beyond that, people were just there to service us. There was nothing that we could give to the people around us. Everything inside us seemed to be drained out by these huge, terrifying concerts.

We closed in on ourselves, negative towards the stream of people that passed us, and quick and defensive towards any who might be trying to score points off us.

We had to start to believe that we were gods simply in order to survive in the absurd environment where we had to give so many people their money's worth.

'Sydney thinks you ought to see some of this mail that's been sent to you.'

It was about four in the afternoon, we had only just got up, but the lounge of our Detroit hotel suite was already full with journalists, hopeful coke dealers, and even more hopeful groupies. I had developed a kind of black silk karate suit, which I could roll out of bed into, to cope with this twenty-four hour display.

I had just shaken myself free of an earnest young man with a tape recorder from probably *Rolling Stone,* although I wasn't sure, when Wayne McArthur, the tour manager that Gutman had hired for us, grabbed me by the arm.

'Sydney thinks it would be best if you saw these.'

I looked at him in horror.

'Come on, man. I don't have time right now for fan mail.'

'It's not ordinary fan mail, it's just these five odd ones.'

'Not hate letters, we've had plenty of those in England.'

'These do seem to go a bit over the edge.'

He handed me a bundle of five letters and I pulled the top one out of its envelope. It was pasted together with individual letters cut from magazines.

YOU ARE FOREIGN COMMUNIST PERVERTS AND I HAVE A BULLET SAVED FOR PEOPLE LIKE YOU. DON'T GET ME WRONG I MEAN BUSINESS.

I looked at Wayne.

'How long have these been coming?'

'Since just after the tour started.'

'We've never had death threats before. It's heavy shit.'

I looked at the other letters, they were all pretty much identical. Then I examined the postmark. They'd all been mailed from New York. -

'You showed them to the pigs?'

'Sure, they just shrugged.'

'You think this guy's going to try anything?'

'I doubt it, but who can tell? Sydney's going to hire some protection to be on the safe side.'

'It looks from the postmark like the New York concerts are the ones to look out for.'

'I wouldn't worry about it too much.'

I handed him the letters back.

'It ain't you this freak is threatening to shoot.'

As soon as it was possible, I took the others on one side, and told them about the threats. ferry was ready to laugh it off, but Mac looked troubled.

'It doesn't make for peace of mind, knowing some flutter wants to kill you, and it's really only a matter of whether he can act out his fantasies.'

I didn't say anything, but it seemed to me that Mac had hit the nail on the heed. This was America with its thousands of gun freaks. On a brightly lit stage, we'd stand no chance against an efficient sniper. Maybe he wouldn't get it together, but then again, someone who took all the trouble to clip odd letters out of the newspapers might just get his gun and do it.

There was a definite air of tension when we went on stage that night, but nothing happened. Nothing happened either In the next four cities. No more notes came, and we began to relax. Then, in San Francisco, our mail caught up with us, and there were three more threats, but they were also posted in New York, and the general feeling was that it was there that something might happen if it was going to. Between us and New York there was a week in Los Angeles and three concerts in the South.

The week in LA proved sufficiently weird to drive the thoughts of assassins right to the backs of our minds.

'There's some hippies in reception want to see you.'

Chas had just come back from the auditorium, and the rest of us were lying about in a miraculously empty hotel suite.

'Yeah? Tell them to fuck off. We don't want to see any fucking hippies.'

A bottle of coke was going round, and we were all pleasantly wired. We didn't have a show that night, and the last thing we wanted was an invasion of long haired hustlers.

'They had some pretty weird proposition.'

'Unless they've invented a new wonder drug, we don't want to know.'

'It wasn't that. They kept muttering something about how Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil to be the greatest guitar player in the world, and how they could do the same deal for you.'

Mac burst out laughing.

'Tell them to sod off, we don't need any black magic shows.'

Jerry, however, sat up and took notice.

'Hold on, I want to hear about this.'

'You don't? It's got to be bullshit.'

'Maybe, but it might be a giggle. Send them up.'

Mac and Connie both groaned.

‘Do we have to?’

‘Ah come on, if it’s a yawn, we can always have them thrown out.’

‘If you really can’t resist this shuck then let ‘em come up, but don’t say we didn’t warn you.’

Jerry picked up the phone.

‘Could you tell the people waiting in reception to come up?’

A few minutes later, these five scuzzy hippies walked in, two guys and three chicks.

The leader of the group was a small cat in blue jeans, sandals and an embroidered denim shirt. He had hair down to his waist and a full beard. He looked like a perfectly ordinary freak, the kind you see any day, panhandling on the Strip, except that he had strangely penetrating eyes. I suppose it was his eyes that enabled him to put over all the mystic jive.

The other dude was a big hulking biker type with a dumb beat up face and a broken nose. He wore blue jeans, engineer boots and a Levi jacket with no shirt over a filthy Hulk T-shirt. He didn’t say anything and I assumed he provided the little guy’s muscle. The chicks were kind of nondescript, more San Francisco than LA, bare feet, no makeup, blue jeans and tie-dye. The only thing that distinguished them from a hundred other hippie birds was a weird kind of blankness on their faces. It wasn’t like the usual blank stare of a downer freak, more like their minds just weren’t there.

For almost a minute they stood there staring at us, then the leader took a step forward and looked at each of us in turn, very intently.

‘We’ve come to help you if you’ll let us.’

Mac yawned theatrically, but Jerry seemed anxious to go along with the whole thing.

‘Somebody said how you people knew something about black magic?’

The leader scowled.

‘We don’t much care for the words “black magic”. That’s some of Christian oppression. Christianity has been trying to wipe us out for two thousand years, man.’

‘Yeah? So what are you into?’

The leader looked mystically into space.

‘We just serve our master, and he like rewards us with a certain power.’

Mac noisily snorted some coke, and glared at Jerry.

‘Do we really need this hippy-dippy bullshit?’

Jerry waved at him to shut up.

‘Leave it out, I’m interested. Who’s this master of yours?’

‘It’s not permitted to speak his name, man. The Christians have had lots of names for him, though. Satan, Lucifer.’

Mac snorted.

‘Who needs it?’

But Jerry seemed determined to persevere.

‘And where do you come into it?’

The leader sat down.

‘We been told about you. We see that you have power to move masses of people. We just want to turn you on to the fantastic joy that comes from the master.’

His eyes started to work overtime on Jerry as he went into his rap.

‘You just wouldn’t believe it, man. I thought I’d been high before I got into the master, but wait until you see what he can do.’

Jerry frowned.

‘They all say that man, you don’t sound any different from a Jesus freak.’

The leader leaned forward in his chair.

‘I’m not talking about some kind of lame spiritual buzz. I’m talking about a rush of spiritual ecstasy that blows your head off.’

Jerry swung round and grinned at the rest of us. ‘This religion sounds very appealing.’ He turned back to the leader and his crew.

‘So what do we have to do?’

‘We have prepared a ceremony that you can take part in.’

‘When?’

‘That’s up to you. Tonight?’

Jerry shrugged.

‘Why not?’

He looked at the rest of us.

‘Who fancies going to a ceremony?’

The suggestion wasn’t received with any display of enthusiasm.

‘No.

‘Not me.’

‘Forget it.’

I wasn’t particularly keen, but it seemed unwise to let Jerry go off alone with these nuts.

‘I’ll maybe come with you, for trips.’

Jerry looked contemptuously at the rest of them.

‘What’s the matter with you lot? Ain’t you got no spirit o adventure?’

Mac spread his hands.

‘I don’t call watching a crew of hippies going through some mystic mumbo jumbo an adventure.’

‘Okay, suit yourself.’

Jerry turned back to the leader.

‘When do we have to leave?’

‘As soon as you like, our sanctuary is a couple of hours drive out into the desert.’

‘Yeah? We might as well get started.’ Jerry stood up.

‘Hang on while I get into my clothes.’

He wandered off towards his room, and I did the same Dressing for the desert wasn’t too hard, jeans and Levi shirt and the cowboy boots that I’d brought in Houston. As I was putting on my leather jacket I was struck by a wave of paranoia, and hurried into Jerry’s room.

‘You realize that we’ve just agreed to ride out into the desert with a bunch of devil worshipping weirdos?’

‘You chickening out on me?’

‘No, I said I’ll come, I just think we ought to look out for ourselves.

‘Put on a warm vest?’

‘No seriously, I think we ought to take our own car. If w drive out in their wheels, we’re completely at their mercy.’

Jerry nodded.

‘You got a point there, kid. Can we rent something immediately?’

‘I think so. There’s an Avis office in the foyer. I’ll get Wayne to rent us something, okay?’

‘Okay.’

I picked up the phone.

‘Give me room ten-thirteen.’

I waited while they connected me.

‘Wayne?’

‘Yeah?

‘It’s Lou, can you rent a car for me and Jerry?’

‘Sure. What do you want?’

‘I dunno, a Mustang or something. We want it as soon as possible probably until tomorrow

morning.'

'Okay, I'll call you up.'

Jerry finished dressing, and then the phone rang. It was Wayne.

'There'll be a Mustang outside in five minutes. I'll send someone up with the keys. Okay?'

A thought struck me.

'Don't bother, I'll come down and get them.'

I put down the phone.

'We got a car, I'm going down to get the keys.'

'Okay, I'll see you back in the lounge.'

'Okay.'

I rode down to Wayne's room in the lift. It hit me that it was the first time I'd been out of the hotel suite. It was a slightly odd experience.

I knocked on Wayne's door.

'Lou?'

'Yeah:

'Come in, it's open.'

He tossed me a set of car keys.

'Here, catch. I don't know why you bothered to come all the way down for them. I could have just as easily come up.'

'I wanted to speak to you.'

'Yeah, what about?'

'Do you still have that gun with you? The one you bought in the South?'

Wayne frowned.

'Yeah. Why?'

'I want to borrow it.'

'What the hell for?'

'Protection.'

'Protection? What are you crazy fuckers up to?'

'Jerry and I are going to this weird party, and I just thought it'd be an idea to take a piece with me.'

Wayne looked worried.

'If you're going to a party where you need to take a piece, it seems to me that you don't need to go I'm responsible to Sydney Gutman for you staying in one piece.'

'I'll make sure I'll stay in one piece. I just want to borrow a gun.'

'I still don't think you ought to go.'

'Are you going to stop me doing what I want to do?'

'No, you know I can't do that.'

'Okay then. Just give me the gun.'

'But listen man...'

'Listen nothing, just give me the fucking gun, alright?'

Wayne sighed, walked over to the dressing table and opened a drawer. He pulled out a bundle that was wrapped in a shirt, unfolded it and produced a small black automatic.

'Here, but I don't like it.'

I pushed the gun down the waistband, in the back of my jeans where it wouldn't show under my jacket.

'You worry too much, Wayne. We'll be okay.'

Back in the lounge Jerry and the leader were waiting for us.

'Are we ready to split?'

'Looks like it.'

The leader began to move towards the door.

‘We have our wheels outside.’

I glanced at him.

‘That’s okay, we’ve got our own car. We can follow you.’

He frowned.

‘It’s easy to go wrong, maybe someone should ride with you so you don’t get lost.’

He turned and muttered something to one of the mute girls. She nodded, silently detached herself from his group, and came to stand beside Jerry and me. We all rode down in the lift together, and then the leader and his crew went off in the direction of a big beat up dune buggy, and we climbed into the rented Mustang. The girl still hadn’t said a word. Jerry decided to drive, and I slid into the back so the girl could sit in the front and navigate. I stretched my legs out in the back seat, and looked at the girl.

‘What’s your name, babe?’

‘Sunshine.’

Her voice was as blank as her face.

‘How long have you been hanging out with this crew?’

‘My life started with the leader.’

It was clear that I wasn’t going to get any conversation out of her, so I turned to Jerry.

‘If we’re going to split out to the desert, why don’t we cop some booze?’

‘We’ll lose the buggy.’

‘Don’t matter. Sunshine can tell us the way.’

We pulled into the car park and went inside to lay in some supplies for the trip, and then, with Sunshine directing us, we drove out of the city.

We headed towards San Bernardino, and then swung onto Highway 15 and started out across the desert in the direction of somewhere called Barstow, but before we got there, we swung off the main highway and bounced along a dirt road for about forty minutes until Jerry decided that he had to take a piss. We pulled over to the edge of the road and all climbed out to stretch our muscles, or, at least, Jerry and I climbed out to move about ~a bit, but Sunshine seemed to get out just because we had.

We were leaning against the car, drinking a beer and wondering if the dirt road was liable to wreck the suspension, when Sunshine amazed us both by actually saying something.

‘The leader said I was to fuck you on the way down if you wanted to.’

We looked at each other in surprise. It wasn’t that Sunshine was unattractive. She was no greaty beauty but she had a nice body, and a typical California girl face with the tan and lack of makeup. It was just that her strange non-personality had stopped us thinking of her in terms of any sort of relationship. The flat offer left us completely at a loss. The idea of her just undressing and stretching out on the ground for Jerry and me to ball her in turn didn’t turn me on at all. It was as if she had been completely dehumanized. Jerry must have felt the same thing because he put his arm round her.

‘Do you want to?’

‘I don’t mind. I was told to serve you on the trip.’

‘Well listen, you’re very nice, but maybe tonight after we get where we’re going?’

She showed no emotion at all.

‘Okay, whatever you want.’

She climbed into the car. Jerry and I tossed away our empty beer cans, and slid back into our seats.

There was another hour of dirt road, and then Sunshine told us to turn off on to something that was little more than a track, and we began to worry about the suspension and exhaust system. It’d be no joke to crack up in the middle of the desert.

Just when I started to think that the Mustang was going to shake itself to bits, Sunshine pointed.

‘There, that’s our home.’

At the end of the track there was a collection of broken down buildings. It was like a ranch house set for a Western movie, only weathered and decayed by years in the desert. There was a wind pump that, we found later, actually produced water.

The yard in front of the buildings was littered with garbage, cans, bottles and some old car bodies that were the home for a few scrawny chickens. As well as the wrecks there were some vehicles in working condition, the buggy that they’d come to the hotel in, another smaller one, a pick-up, and three motorcycles.

We pulled up in a romantic cloud of dust, and a huge dog, some kind of Dobermann, Irish wolf hound cross leaped to the end of the chain that secured it to the main building, snarling and barking. A man came out on to the porch. He looked similar to the biker who had come to the hotel. He held a pump shotgun.

‘Who are you, and what d’you want?’

Before we could answer, the leader emerged from inside the building and said something, and the man lowered the gun. The leader stepped off the porch and walked over to meet us. He yelled at the dog, and then turned to us.

‘You made it then? Did Sunshine look after you properly?’

‘Sure.’

‘Okay then, come into the house. You hungry?’

We nodded.

‘Yeah.’

‘Okay then, the women will make food.’

We followed him into the building. The ranch house architecture continued inside, wooden floor and walls, a beamed ceiling and a huge, rough stone fire place. The leader’s crew had worked on it, though, to make it fit their tastes. The floor was partially covered with straw mats and an Indian rug, and the walls were hung with all manner of junk, a Nazi flag, a lot of psychedelic posters, some lengths of tie-dye cloth and patches of crude hippie painting. Against the walls there were a number of mattresses on which lounged about ten people, the biker who had come to the hotel, the one who had appeared with the shotgun, and another from the same mould, a little guy in cowboy clothes, and five girls.

The girls all had the same look as Sunshine, the tans, and the long straight hair, only it seemed that they didn’t wear too many clothes around the old homestead. One was completely naked, another wore a bikini bottom and sandals, two were just wearing sawn-off blue jeans while the final girl had on a man’s work shirt.

The leader clapped his hands.

‘We want some food.’

The girls obediently scrambled to their feet and left the room, while we men were left with the remains of our case of beer. The little guy in the cowboy clothes produced a brass hash pipe and passed it round. The leader punched a cartridge into a battery eight track machine and *Beggars Banquet* pounded into the room, while we sat down getting ripped.

Pleased to meet you, hope you guess my name

The beer and dope began to wash the mystery out of the room, and I started to relax. It was just like visiting a bunch of country freaks, and then the girls came back, and their blank faces and instant obedience were a constant reminder that everything was not quite normal.

The food was mixed, there was a huge mess of brown rice that Jerry and I viewed with distaste, a salad that was quite reasonable, and some steaks that, although they’d been cooked over an open fire, were really excellent.

After the meal, the leader produced a small polythene bag from inside his shirt.

‘Best we should get ready for the master.’

He glanced at the girls.

‘Where are the others?’

Sunshine looked up from clearing away the dishes.

‘They were sent to the barn yesterday.’

‘Go and fetch them. Tell them that I’ll let their punishment wait for the moment.’

Sunshine hurried out and quickly returned with three other girls. Two were naked, and the third wore a tattered sued miniskirt. The one in the skirt had a set of marks on her body as though she had been recently beaten.

The leader began to distribute the contents of the bag. First to the eight girls, then to the three bikers, the guy in the cowboy suit and finally to Jerry and me.

They were little brown fibrous buttons. Jerry tossed his in his hand before swallowing.

‘What is it?’

The leader gave him one of the patent heavy stares.

‘It’ll help you prepare for the master.’

Jerry shrugged and swallowed it, I did the same.

The leader stood up.

‘It’ll take maybe an hour for it to come on, maybe you’d like to walk around and take a look at the place?’

I glanced at Jerry.

‘Want to?’

‘Why not?’

Jerry and I climbed to our feet.

‘We’ll take a walk.’

The leader escorted us to the door.

‘Don’t go near the dog, it’s savage.’

We both looked at it where it lay baring its teeth and resolved to give it a wide berth.

We wandered across the yard and looked back to see if anyone followed us. One of the bikers was lounging on the porch, but beyond that everything was quiet and deserted.

‘What do you think we’ve taken? Peyote?’

‘Or psilocybin, one of the two.’

‘What do you think’s going on?’

Jerry shrugged.

‘Nothing much, five guys and eight chicks. They drop a lot of psychedelics and get into orgies. The leader’s a kind of persuasive nut who dresses the whole thing up in voodoo drag.’

‘But those chicks look like zombies.’

‘Sure, the leader probably set the whole thing up. He keeps the bikers around as muscle and he probably collected a gang of chicks to keep the bikers quiet.’

‘But how does he get the chicks like they are?’

‘They’re probably nutty to begin with, he gets ‘em out in the desert, fills ‘em up with acid or something and does a job on their heads until they’re completely docile. Probably beats them, or lets the bikers beat them to keep them in line. Did you see the chick in the suede skirt?’

‘Yeah, I guess you’re right. Who do you think the cowboy is?’

‘Dunno, maybe a recruit. I’d be prepared to bet that he’s probably some rich kid off the Strip, and they’re working on him to get his money.’

‘Is that what he’s got in mind for us?’

‘Kind of, except we’re more valuable. He’s probably got some idea that we’ll make him into a big international guru, like the Beatles did for the Maharishi.’

‘You’re not really worried about him then?’

‘Nah, we can take care of a small time psychedelic witch doctor. I figure it’s the bikers we need to watch out for, there were a lot of guns lying round that place. Did you see them?’

I shook my head.

'No.'

'No, you wouldn't have from where you were sitting. There was a whole bunch of weapons, a couple of pump shotguns, an M-16, plus a couple of hand guns, a machete and a long stock whip.'

'Nasty.'

'Yeah, I reckon the bikers are gun freaks.'

'I'll be nice to them.'

The little automatic nestling inside my belt was quite comforting.

'Yeah, just take.., hold on, we've got company.'

Sunshine and the girl in the suede skirt had come out of the big building and were coming towards us.

Sunshine had discarded her shirt, and was now only wearing Jeans. It seemed that the shirt was only for going into the city. We walked to meet them.

'Hi, you looking for us?'

Sunshine nodded.

'The leader sent us out to see if you needed anything. Our ceremony will start after dark. He said that maybe we should walk with you and look at the sunset. It can be very beautiful out in the desert.'

We fell in beside them and slowly walked away from the buildings. Little lines of colour started to surround things that I looked at. I knew that the peyote, or whatever it was, was starting to come on, and despite the strange and possibly threatening surroundings, I began to feel quite good. Jerry interrupted my thoughts.

'Why don't we take the car, and drive out into the desert?'

The girls shook their heads.

'We can't. We're not allowed to leave the ranch.'

Jerry shrugged.

'Okay, we'll walk then. Do you always do exactly what the leader tells you?'

Sunshine halted and looked faintly surprised.

'Of course. Our lives come from the master through him, We must always please him. If we don't we've failed and have to be punished. Dig?'

'Punished? You let yourselves be punished?'

'If we deserve it.'

Jerry turned to the one in the skirt.

'Is that what happened to you?'

She nodded.

'I did wrong, and Sol was told to take me to the barn and deal with me. I guess I deserved it.'

Jerry shook his head, and walked on in silence. I supposed that Sol was one of the bikers, but the button was really beginning to come on, and the desert and the strange atmosphere of the ranch blurred into a rambly stream of thoughts. The red sky was magnificent, and I began to be really drawn towards the naked girls. There was something perversely exciting about their vulnerability and total submission. Jerry already had his arm round Sunshine and was absentmindedly fondling her breast, so I fell into step with the girl in the skirt.

'What's your name?'

'Star.'

'Is that the name the leader gave you?'

'Of course.'

'What was your name before that?'

'I never had one, I never was alive before I came here.'

‘And you don’t want to leave?’

‘Oh no. I never want to leave.’

‘Even though they beat you?’

‘When I’m punished I deserve it.’

I ran my hand down the red welts on her back.

‘It must have hurt a lot.’

She nodded.

‘It did, but I knew I deserved it.’

There seemed to be no way to break through the solid vice of conditioning that was clamped on her personality. We walked on across the desert, and soon Jerry and Sunshine were some way off. I stopped and had a moment of complete mindless awe at the reds and oranges of the dying sunlight, then I noticed that Star had obediently stopped a fraction behind me. In the last glare of the sun, her skin had turned golden, and standing there in just the tattered skirt with her vulnerable breasts and sad vacant face she looked like something primitive and lost. I suddenly wanted her.

‘Star, I’d dig to fuck you.’

She glanced at me, and her hands went to the thonged fastening of her skirt. Without a word she let it drop around her ankles, and crouched down on the ground looking up at me. I began to take my clothes off.

Balling her was an unnerving experience. She did everything that I wanted, tried her very hardest to make me feel good, but even in her final gasping responses there was a strange disconnection. Her body grasped at me, holding this chance to express itself, but her burned out mind seemed to have only the single idea of serving. All idea of self, of her own desires, seemed to have been erased by the leader’s treatment.

We got back to the ranch just as it was getting dark. The leader’s family were sitting round a fire that had been built in the yard. As we came into the light he stood up. He knew how to get the full effect of the flames, and stood so they cast satanic shadows across his face. It was like a Hammer movie, except that I was now so far gone behind the stuff he’d given us that seeds of real fear were planted in my brain. I desperately wanted to get away from there, but felt unable to leave the light of the fire. As well as the fear, there was something primitive, a reckless self destructiveness, something like the feeling I sometimes got on stage.

The leader directed his gaze at the two girls.

‘You’ve been a long time.’

Jerry tried to intervene.

‘It’s our fault, we walked fucking miles out in the desert.’

The leader didn’t appear to hear him, and his gaze stayed fixed on the girls.

‘You should be careful. If you stay away too much, it could happen that you might be made to stay away for ever.’

They cringed visibly, but nothing happened and we sat down with the strange crowd round the fire. I peered at the assembled faces. They were all staring transfixed into the blaze. The guy in the cowboy suit seemed completely lost, his jaw was slack and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. I wondered vaguely how long they had been dosing him with peyote, but the thought faded and I too found myself locked into the colours and patterns of the leaping, twisting flames.

I gradually became aware that the leader was quietly talking in a soft singsong that was halfway between normal speech and a chant.

‘The fire. The fire is so nice. The fire is given us by the master. The fire is his first gift. It is the first power that he gave to those who served him. Fire is the master’s gift that keeps away the dark and cold. It is safe here, so safe in the circle, so safe by the fire. Outside it’s so dark, outside away from the fire. It’s so dark. We are safe by the fire, so nice to be safe. The master

keeps us safe with his fire.'

I felt his words glide over me, linking me with the group and making me afraid of the hostile darkness. I was filled with a terrible loneliness that made me desperately want to be a part of the group. I knew I'd do anything if it meant they'd accept me.

Then I caught myself. It was just crude brain washing, psychedelic fascism, making the subject/victim totally dependent on the group and its leader. Turning an individual into a submissive follower who can be put through anything just so long as the group allows him to remain part of it.

His voice still remained persuasive, but I felt better equipped to resist the fear it was trying to build up inside me. I couldn't completely shut out its effect, though, and nothing would have made me get up and walk away from the fire. When, after a long time, it suddenly stopped, I found myself desperately wanting it to go on.

There were a few moments of silence, and then this strident drum music. I was bewildered for the first few seconds, and then I realized that the leader had the eight track machine beside him.

Two of the girls produced tambourines from somewhere, and began to beat them in time. The rest of us took up the rhythm, clapping our hands, and even the three skull-like bikers nodded their heads like great carrion birds.

The leader flashed a signal at the girls with tambourines and they jumped up and began to dance, leaping and swaying, a combination of Isadora Duncan and go-go. I watched them, and caught myself wanting to join in.

Then, above the tape, his voice snapped with a slap of compulsive authority.

'Star and Flower, serve Tag.'

The two girls moved instantly to one of the bikers beside the leader, and he lay back while they undid his clothes and began to work on him with their hands and mouths. The other two bikers joined in and the leader summoned over more girls, at the same time telling the rest of us to get up and dance.

It was an absurd sight, I was hallucinating like crazy, and the fire, the squirming couple in the group and the dancing figures around them swirled and blended in savage patterns of reds and browns. The drum music was like a roaring in my head, an animal thing that was taking me over, I found myself pawing at one of the girls, then rolling on the ground biting and thrusting at her. It was a scene of insanity heightened by the drugs and the flickering fire.

Then the energy flashed and drained away, and I lay on the earth, without any kind of thought, spent and vacant. The leader's voice brought me back. He was speaking quietly to a background of desert sounds. The drums had gone. There was just his voice again.

'It's time for the mystery. The great gift of the master. There are no secrets amongst us, all must know the mystery. We must cast out our fear, abandon ourselves to his power.

I looked round wildly at Jerry, but he was transfixed, leaning forward with a hand on the girl's leg. I wanted to run, but where? I couldn't leave him there. Then the leader made a signal with his hand, and the two bikers stood up. They grabbed the cowboy kid, and dragged him to his feet with his arms twisted behind him. The leader was also on his feet, and in his right hand he swung the machete that Jerry had seen in the cabin.

He advanced on the unresisting kid. He raised the broad blade, and...

I didn't wait to watch. I jumped to my feet, grabbed Jerry's arm and began to run. We stumbled into the shifting, hallucinating darkness. There was a shout behind but I didn't look back. I saw the car and dragged Jerry towards it. Once at the car he seemed to come alive again. He wrenched open the door and fell into the driver's seat. The doors slammed, and, thanking God we'd left the keys in, we spun the back wheels as we jolted away from the ranch.

I pulled the gun from my jeans and swung round in my seat. Jerry saw the gun and his eyes

widened.

'Where the fuck did that come from?'

'I brought it from the hotel.'

We said nothing as we jolted and bounced down the awful rutted trail. Each bounce seemed to produce showers of sparks inside my head. It must have been the same for Jerry as he wrestled with the wheel, but he didn't stop until we hit the smoother dirt road.

After we'd turned on to it, Jerry stopped and cut the lights and we looked back for signs of pursuit, but there didn't seem to be any.

Jerry and I looked at each other in horror.

'Was that real?'

'They were going to...'

'I don't know.'

'It looked like...'

'I was completely into it, man, that was the terrible thing, I...'

Jerry slumped across the wheel, sobbing helplessly. I put an arm round his shoulder, feeling totally lost. After about a minute he recovered, sat up and started the car. Neither of us spoke until we were out on the outskirts of LA.

'Light me a cigarette.'

I was roused from my coming down thoughts.

'What?'

'Light me a cigarette, will you Lou?'

'Sure.'

I lit two fags and passed one to Jerry. He inhaled deeply.

'That scene never happened, right?'

I looked at him in amazement.

'But that kid, if they did kill him...'

'It never happened, okay?'

'Suppose a body's found?'

'There's no one out there in the desert to find anything. It never happened unless we decide it did.'

'But what about the girls, we can't just split and do nothing.'

'There's nothing we can do. It's their trip, their problems. We're out of it, Lou. It never happened.'

His knuckles whitened as he gripped the wheel. I sighed.

'I guess you're right.'

The dawn was coming up as we got to the hotel, and our faces looked grey, reflected in the glass doors.

Wayne woke me at around five the next day, and, even after a handful of sleepers and ten hours' sleep, I still felt sick. I kept having shuddering flashes of the flames and the transfixed faces. I tried to burrow back into the pillow, but Wayne shook me by the shoulder.

'Come on., Lou. You're playing tonight, and there's some people to see you.'

'I don't want to see anyone. Tell them to fuck off.'

Wayne wouldn't leave it alone though, he opened the curtains and let the daylight in. I sat up in bed and reached for a cigarette.

'For Christ's sake go away, man. I'm sick of being on display, I'm sick of having to listen to all the lame-brained schemes that people want to lay on me.'

'Ah listen, Lou, it's part of the job. Sydney's flown in with these important people. Do me a favour, man. Get up and see them.'

'Fuck it man, why should I do people favours? I've had it up to here with doing people

favours. I'm exhausted with doing people favours. Who the fuck ever does me any favours?'

Wayne produced a tiny box from his pocket.

'Have a snort of coke, man. You'll feel better. You really must see these guys.'

I took the cocaine, and began to feel a little more human. I swung one leg out of bed.

'Okay, tell them I'm coming.'

I struggled into my karate suit and followed Wayne into the lounge. There was Sydney and two ether guys waiting for us. One was a little fat cat with a shiny bald head and a Brooks Brothers suit, while the other looked like the Playboy executive in his Carnaby Street suit, matching shirt and tie and Brian Jones haircut. The rest of the band were there with them, they all appeared to be waiting for me to show.

Directly I walked in, Gutman took charge of the meeting.

'Lou, I'd like you to meet Stanley Currie and Dean Mc Cann.'

I shook hands with them, wondering which was which, and flopped into a chair. There was one of those awkward silences. Sydney finally broke it.

'These gentlemen want to talk to you about a project in which they are about to become involved.'

Mac yawned.

'Yeah? What's that?'

McCann, who turned out to be the Playboy swinger, smiled a chummy, all-hip-together smile.

'We are currently piecing together the campaign for our next president.'

'Next president? I thought you only just had some elections?'

'There is a lot of work involved in putting together a political campaign, particularly one that is attempting to place a radical candidate before the electorate.'

'I didn't think America had radical presidents.'

Playboy flashed a shit-eating grin.

'That's a situation that we intend to change. We have a candidate who, we feel, can successfully present radical solutions to the ordinary people of this country.'

'Who is this superman?'

'Senator David Guthrie.'

'Never heard of him.'

'I can guarantee that you will.'

Jerry had been staring at the floor all through this exchange, then his head suddenly snapped up.

'What's this got to do with us?'

The little fat guy took over.

'We would like to involve you in sonic of our plans. We feel that such an involvement could be mutually beneficial.'

I laughed.

'Us? You've got to be kidding. Everyone over thirty hates us.'

'People now have the vote at eighteen.'

'And you want us to turn out the kids to vote for this Guthrie?'

'That's putting it crudely, but yes, that's what we're here for.'

'Forget it.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Forget it.'

'Do you really understand what being allied with a successful president could mean?'

I shrugged.

'Okay, tell us about it.'

'The idea was that you could maybe make appearances in a mass drive for voter

registration. This kind of situation could mean that a future tour could be virtually underwritten.'

'So what you're offering is a free tour if we encourage the kids to vote?'

The little guy was starting to sweat a bit.

'That's only one idea. I'm sure that there are many other projects that you might like to work on. I know that Senator Guthrie is interested in forging strong two way links with young representatives like yourselves.'

'But we're British.'

'You still seem to have caught the imagination of American youth.'

'Are you making similar offers to the Black Panthers?'

'Well, no, at the moment that would be political suicide.'

'They seem to have caught the imagination of black American youth.'

'Yes but...'

'But, they don't count?'

'That's not what I was going to say. The senator has a long, distinguished record in the civil rights field.'

Steve stared at the fat guy.

'Are you going to legalize dope?'

'It's not in our immediate plans.'

'Why not?'

'I think it would be too much for the general electorate to take.'

'So what are you offering us?'

'If you made a contribution to a successful campaign, I'm sure the rewards, both financial and in terms of access to the highest authority, would be enormous.'

Jerry slowly shook his head.

'You're full of shit.'

'What?'

'You're full of shit, man. You come in here and want us pulling the freaks so they'll vote for you, but you don't say one damn thing about what you're going to do for those freaks whose vote you want. You just offer us power and money, and think we'll do what you want.'

The swinger tried to placate us.

'It's not like that at all, fellas...'

Connie cut him off.

'Oh yes it is. We have all kinds of freaks come to see us. They lay their trips on us, religious, political, they try to turn us on to their ideas in the hope that we'll dig it and help them with some project. They take the trouble, no matter how crazy they are, to sell us on their ideas. You just walk in here and think we'll do what you want without question. If that's all the respect you have for our intelligence or our people, nothing in your attitude makes the idea of the administration you might produce very appealing.'

'You're turning us down just like that?'

'Yes.'

'There is the other side of the coin. It could prove a distinct disadvantage to have turned down this opportunity.'

Jerry jack-knifed to his feet.

'My God! Now you're trying to threaten us. You bastards really don't know what's happening, do you?'

'I don't see...'

'No you don't, you don't see anything. You don't realize that we can pull a bigger audience than any president. The kids trust us, and we're not about to sell out that trust for a few

favours from you. We don't come that cheap.'

'Is that your last word?'

'I think so.'

'And does that go for the rest of the band?'

We all nodded. In their own way, these guys were sleazier than the leader and his crew. They stood up and looked at Gutman.

'It's a pity it didn't work out, Sydney.'

'Possibly.'

Sydney showed them to the door, but just as they were leaving, Mac called after them.

'If you really want a rock band to promote your boy, why don't you form one? Like the Monkees.'

Sydney came back from showing them out.

'You were a little rough with those guys.'

'So? They were full of shit.'

'So you said.'

Jerry looked questioningly at Gutman.

'Did you set that one up?'

'No. They just came to me with the proposition, and I passed it along to you.'

'Has it upset your plans that we grossed them out?' —'Not really. There might have been advantages to getting in with Guthrie, but I doubt if he'll win.'

We all relaxed. It would have shaken our faith in him if Gutman had tried to push us into that kind of deal. Jerry changed the subject.

'What are we going to do about New York?'

Sydney looked surprised.

'What about New York? It's all set. Three concerts and a lot of press and TV.'

Jerry shook his head.

'I didn't mean that, I meant about those letters we've been getting.'

'You take them seriously?'

'I don't see how we can afford not to. The guy keeps threatening to kill us, and I don't see any reason not to take him seriously.'

'A lot of people make threats, particularly against celebrities. They don't usually do anything about it.'

I felt myself beginning to tense up. After the previous night, all this talk of death was beginning to get to me. It seemed that I was sinking deeper and deeper into a kind of tainted half world. It was like our evil pose was starting to become real. Ii was actually able to touch us. The insulation had gone. We seemed to be naked, standing around, exposed to any nut who wanted to have a go at us. Fear began to rise up inside me then it burst

'None of you seem to realize that this is a nut who's talking about killing us. It's not some sort of academic problem that you can evaluate logically.'

I could hear the hysterical edge to my voice, but there was nothing I could do about it.

'It's more than likely me that'll get knocked off. I'm the front man, and I'll be the target.'

Last night's flames were inside my head. Burning paranoia that was kindled by the coke.

'I suppose the rest of you don't care too much. If the singer was shot down on stage it'd really make you a legend.'

Connie stood up.

'Take it easy, man. What's the matter with you? Of course we don't want to see you get shot. We're just trying to work out what to do about it.'

Sydney sat on the arm of my chair.

'Do you want to cancel the New York concerts?'

The presence of Gutman seemed somehow large and comforting. I felt the attack of

hysteria ebb away, and began to think more rationally again.
'No, no, That's be stupid, but we ought to do something about it. I'm not sure what, though.'

Steve had summed up New York -in one of his rare sayings, 'What I like about it is the chicks'll suck your prick any time or any place,' but this freewheeling, fucking and stoned attitude that we'd had on the last tour had been replaced with a tense uneasiness.
Our stay at the Chelsea was even more of a continuous party than the last one, but the band seemed to draw closer and closer together, a tight cold knot in the centre of the festivities.

'...And you wouldn't believe it, man. She said her name was Candy, and she was really beautiful. Then we got back to my room and she gave me a blow job before we'd even undressed. It was too much, and then she took her clothes off - and she was a fucking man.'
'So what did you do?'
'Well, I was a bit freaked at first, but she started rapping, telling me how rock musicians have got to be latent fags or else they wouldn't be able to maintain the relationships that hold a band together.'
'And?'
'Well, I was ripped, and she was very persuasive, so I spent the night with her.'
'How was it?'
'Great.'
We all laughed. We'd found that if we stayed out of our heads all the time, we almost forgot our troubles. The film maker in the leather coat, who looked like Pierre Clementi, interrupted.
'How come you keep calling this guy "she"? It sounds like some kind of heterosexual protection.'
Mac shrugged.
'Maybe, I dunno.'
There was more laughter, and then the phone rang. Connie picked it up.
'Hello.'
He frowned.
'Who is that?'
He listened for a moment, and then scowled and put it down.
'Who was it?'
'It sounded like a breather call.'
'That's odd.'
'You musicians are so lucky. I never get obscene calls.'
'It wasn't obscene, it wasn't anything. Just silence.'
The coldness crept into the room.
'Was it the flutter, do you think?'
'I don't know, it could have been. Then again, it might have been some little chick who got too scared to speak when we answered.'
Two hours later, the phone rang again. I was nearest to it, and I picked it up.
'Hello.'
'There's a call for you.'
'Thank you.'
There was a click and a faint sound of breathing. "Who is that?'
Nothing happened.
'Who's there?'
'Did you commies get my letters?'

‘Who are you?’
‘I meant what I said.’
There was the sound of the connection being broken. There was no doubt about it, this was our flutter. He was an American, but that was about all I could tell from his accent. I dropped the phone back into its rest. Everyone in the room seemed to be staring at me.
‘It was him.’
‘Are you sure?’
‘He asked if we’d got his letters.’
‘Did he say anything else?’
‘He said that he meant it, and then hung up.’

We spent the next two days rehearsing, but each time we got back to the hotel, we found that there had been more phone calls.
After the second day’s rehearsal, we called Sydney over and cleared out all the hangers on. We were frightened, but it was past the time for hysterics. We got straight down to business.
‘What kind of protection can we buy?’
‘It depends what kind of protection you want.’
‘Protection against getting shot.’
‘Do you have anything in mind?’
‘We don’t want to cancel the concerts.’
‘So? What can be done?’
‘How about we hire guys who can shoot fast and accurately? Have them on the stage, and distributed round the auditorium.’
‘There’s a lot of auditorium.’
‘Thirty or forty guys ought to be able to cover it.’
‘That’s an awful lot of guns to hire for four concerts.’
‘We can afford it’
Gutman nodded.
‘I’ll get as many as I can, but it’s a terrible risk. People in the audience are quite liable to get hurt.’
‘Just so long as nothing happens to us.’
Connie frowned.
‘What kind of people are you going to hire for this? Cops?’
Gutman shook his head.
‘I wouldn’t trust the police department with the job, not even if we were paying them.’
‘Who then?’
‘I think I know the right people. It’s justa matter of whether I can get enough of them at this short notice.’
‘Well, do your best.’
Jerry suddenly sat up.
‘I’ve just had another idea.’
‘Yeah, what?’
‘We could have a check on the entrances. Like the ones they have at airports to stop hijacking. We could say we were looking for tape machines, say it was to stop bootlegging.’
‘That’s quite a good idea actually. We should be able to stop anybody with anything larger than a pistol.’
‘It wouldn’t be that easy to hit any of us with a pistol from the audience.’
‘It happened to Bobby Kennedy.’

The precautions were all taken. Checks on the door, metal detectors and pro marksmen. We

did the first concert and nothing happened.

Second concert, and still nothing happened. The third concert, and still nothing.

The cars arrived to take us to the auditorium at around six. We rode down in three Cadillacs with four rent-a-cop motorcycle escorts.

At the auditorium we ignored the stage door and by prearrangement we slipped inside ~ fire exit before the fans around the stage door noticed us. We made our way down the labyrinth of backstage tunnels and corridors that led eventually to the dressing rooms.

There was one large main room, white tiled and echoing. This was the one for the press, the hangers on and the chickies. When we arrived they were all there. Our little court, desperately revolving, aimless without us to be its centre. As we walked in they all turned and seemed to rush at us. The only way to survive was to focus your eyes about two feet in front of you, and pretend to be very short sighted.

Down the centre of the room was a huge table, loaded down with Colonel Sanders' fried chicken, cold cuts, salads, fruit and a massive amount of booze.

I headed straight for this, brushing past the music press interviewing each other with their Sony cassette machines. A stereo had been set up and was pumping out *Dr John the Night Tripper.* It came to an end and someone put on one of our albums, but Jerry yelled them to take it off. It was quickly replaced by an old Everly Brothers.

I made it to the table and was reaching out for a bottle of Jack Daniels. I feel safer at times like these with a bottle in my hand. A little lizard faced guy came up and stood beside me. He looked like he'd been hitting the hospitality for some time.

'You're Lou Francis, aren't you?'

I gave him a short sighted stare.

'That's right.'

He leaned closer. His breath reeked of booze.

'Let me tell you man, you ain't half as big as you like to pretend.'

He drew back his fist to take a swing at me, but before he could deliver, one of Gutman's heavies chopped him across the throat and dragged him outside. Clutching my bottle I swung round on Marshall Roth, the promoter.

'Who the hell was that guy? How did he get in here?'

Roth angrily came back at me.

'How the hell should I know? The number of people that Gutman keeps bringing in makes it impossible to keep track of what's going on.'

The PR boys swarmed around us, cooling out the bad scene, and I was separated from Roth. One thing was clear, though, he hadn't been told about either the death threats or the protection.

With a tight grip on my trusty bottle I decided to get out of the circus and seek refuge in the side room where the black band who did the first half were blowing Jamaican grass. I found my way blocked by a determined chickie. Her New York voice said how pleased she was to actually meet me, but her body and face told me that she wanted it so much that she was prepared to take it just about anywhere. I slipped past her and made it into the spades'.

They grinned as I walked in.

'Some freak show out there?'

'You're not kidding.'

Jerry was in there already, and he passed me a joint. We had strange relationship with the spades. It was our tour and, in a way, that made us the boss men, but as musicians they were miles ahead of us. It had made for an odd kind of half and half attitude at the start of the tour, but in time we'd become used to each other and things had settled down.

After a couple of joints, Jerry took me on one side.

'Last concert before we go home, Lou. It's now or never for the flutter.'

'Maybe he just couldn't get it on. I don't really want to talk about it. I'd rather pretend he didn't exist.'

'I know what you mean.'

'Okay then.'

We were conveniently interrupted by the black band getting ready to go on.

'You coming up to watch us?'

We nodded.

'Yeah sure, in a minute.'

The spades trooped out with their instruments and Jerry and I were left alone. It was a weird moment, circled with traps that could lead us into theatrical romantics. We both knew that in an hour we might walk out to get shot, but there seemed no way of saying it. Maybe Rodney was right all that time ago, maybe we should have been lovers. The trouble was that I couldn't imagine sleeping with Jerry, any more than I could find the right words for this moment.

There was a long silence, which Jerry finally broke.

'I think I'm going to get my shots.'

On arriving in New York, Jerry had connected with a doctor who was more than happy to come to the concerts and shoot him full of a nifty combination of speed, muscle relaxant and vitamins. He went off in search of the good doc and I was alone in the empty room. I could either stay there and brood or go back out into the circus.

I picked a third alternative, which was to go up to the stage and watch the spades, although even that involved passing through the crowd outside.

I opened the door and began to push my way through, the trick is to try never to catch anyone's eye. Then I got sidetracked by a small coke convention that was being conducted by Chas, a couple of his crew, and three or four guys from the underground press. I had a spoon or two, and then, to my dismay, found myself buttonholed by an art deco lady in silver lame whose blond hair fell over one eye, Jean Harlow fashion. She put a hand on my arm.

'You wouldn't know how great it is to actually come to one of your concerts, to actually get backstage.'

Her fingers were going at my sleeve. She looked okay and I decided to be charitable.

'Why don't we try to get together after the show?'

She looked amazed for an instant, then her cool reasserted itself.

'Do you mean that?'

'Sure, why not? If you miss me in the rush, head for the Chelsea. I'll leave word to let you up to our suite.'

'Too much! Thanks.'

I kissed her on the cheek.

'Listen, I've got to do a few things.'

I had to get away. If she came to the hotel, she'd be available for someone to screw. I started to move away but her hand was still on my arm.

'Please be careful.'

My head spun, she couldn't know anything about the threats.

'What do you mean?'

'It could be a weird show tonight.'

I felt suddenly on a knife edge.

'Why? Why could it be weird?'

'I did a horoscope for tonight. The moon's in Scorpio.'

'Yeah? What does that mean?'

‘Usually death or some sort of violence, destruction.’

‘You’re putting me on?’

‘No really. Please, you’re hurting me.’

I looked down, and saw that my hand was locked on her wrist like a vice. It was a bad moment. The fear had come to the top, and in front of someone who wasn’t part of the band.

‘I’m sorry. I don’t like omens.’

I took a long swallow from my bottle of Jack Daniels and then made her a gift of what was left.

‘Here. See you later if I survive.’

If she turned up at the Chelsea I’d have to ball her after letting myself go like that.

I made my way through the party without any other encounters, grabbing a couple of beers on the way, then I climbed the stairs to the stage. A security man advanced to stop me, then he saw who I was, and backed off.

I watched the show until the spades announced their last number. That was the signal• for me to hurry down to our private dressing room to put on my jumpsuit and have my makeup done.

Together as a group, we made our way back to the stage. Nobody said too much, just to check a couple of points. No talk about possible trouble.

As we waited in the wings, Jerry passed me a bottle of Dimple Haig and I took a hit from it. I was just over the edge of really keeping control, but the occasional lurch was expected of us.

The sound system was pumping out Beethoven, accompanied by the electric grunts of amp tests.

Chas came over to where we were standing. He had taken his shirt off and was sweating. He jerked his thumb towards the stage.

‘It’s all together. There’s water and cold beers behind Connie’s stool.’

I passed him the whisky bottle.

‘Got a fag?’

He pulled a battered pack of Pall Malls out of his jeans and shook one free; I put it in my mouth, and he lit it. The cigarette was bent and drooping.

Roth came hustling through the backstage. He was also sweating, but he kept his jacket on.

‘Are we all ready to go?’

For a while nobody seemed inclined to answer him. Then Jerry slowly turned round.

‘We’re ready.’

Something getting born honey
Running out of hand
Something getting born honey
Something
That you don’t understand
All right!
Run for home

It’s the last long pounding break when everything turns into pure noise. Rushing for the last final explosion.

Understanding
You won’t find
Try to hide it
Or divide
Come on!
Help me!

I want you to help me

Help me please

I'm just screaming, the words blur into crazy animal shouting, the guitars into a solid roar. It builds and builds and with it a terrible weight is being lifted off me.

Come on children!

Hear me talkin' to ya!

The crazy killer couldn't do it. He couldn't back up his letters and his calls. We're free of the fear. I jerk and twist. There's nothing more to worry about.

The banked strobes at the sides of the stage flicker into life.

Na-na-na-na-ah-oh God!

Frenetic white light freeze frame dancing, flailing my arms like an Indian god. Not Krishna but maybe Kali. Dancing for all I'm worth.

Come on! Come on!

Love me! Hold me!

The house lights slowly come up. I stand rigid, legs spread, resting on the side of my boots. One arm hangs limp, holding the mike, the other is raised to the sky. For the first time I can see the audience. They seem to go on for ever, stacked up, all around us. Like cattle stampeded by the noise they swarm, pressing to the front. They all want to be embraced by the final climax.

I twist into the air.

Come on along!

Come on now!

I spot a little chick, about ten-yards back, shaking her head so hard in time that it seems in danger of coming off. Then I see next to her there's something that doesn't fit.

There's this little guy, a thin ratty face with short greasy hair, staring fixedly at me from deep sunk eyes, a static unit in the bobbing, heaving mass. Could it be? I stop and look at him, he's fascinating, and I begin to feel like the rabbit staring at the snake. He is fumbling under his coat, and...

Horror.

He has a gun in his hand.

Everything goes into slow motion. The gun comes slowly up and is pointed at me.

The spell breaks.

Normal time rushes back.

I see Jerry, he is also at the front of the stage. Eyes closed, he has noticed nothing. I dive at him. There's a flash. The noise of the shot is drowned by the music, but a hole appears in one of the speaker cabinets.

I collide with Jerry, and we fall to our knees in a tangle of arms, legs and guitar. I see his mouth form 'what the fuck', but there's too much noise to explain.

The audience surrounding the guy have realized what is happening. A big longhair in a Levi jacket is wrestling with him, and more people are trying to grab him. The rent-a-cops are trying to push their way through but they have no chance. The kids are all over the gunman. He disappears under a pile of chicks.

My God!

They are tearing him to pieces! It's too much.

Jerry has realized what is going on now, and we both climb to our feet. The rent-a-cops have reached the guy, and are trying to pull off the chicks, but they keep on going at him like soldier ants.

Jerry begins to play again, there seems to be nothing else to do. He signals to Connie and they start to wind it up. Cops and ambulance men are hustling the guy's body out of the arena.

We crash to the end.

It's over.

The roar of applause starts. Most of the crowd know nothing of what has happened. They're on their feet yelling and stamping for an encore.

We run from the stage, and the roadies move up to protect the instruments from souvenir hungry fans.

Down the corridor and into the car. We made it. The magic worked. I should have had more faith, we couldn't be hurt. We are untouchable. The little guy tried it, but he dashed himself to pieces on the solid wall of power.

It's back to the hotel, cocaine and Jean Harlow, while somewhere they are dumping what's left of the little guy in the morgue, broken because he tried, for an instant, to get up there with us.

But he just wasn't able to make it.